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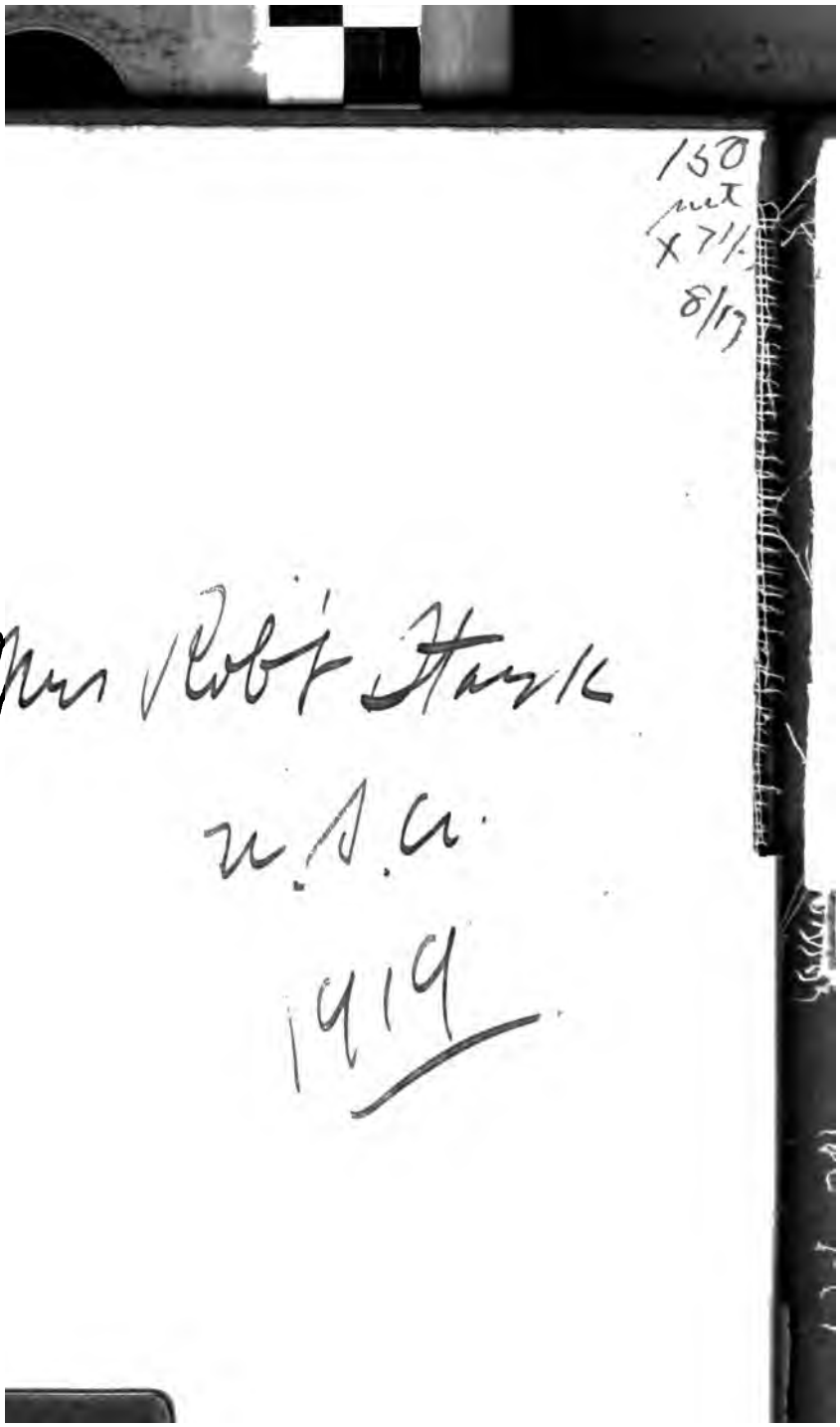
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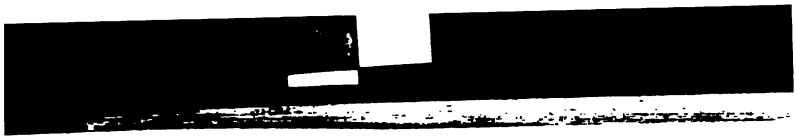
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THE YELLOW LORD

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THE YELLOW LORD



BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

THE YELLOW LORD
THE HIVE
THE LAST DITCH
CHILD AND COUNTRY
LOT & COMPANY
RED FLEECE
MIDSTREAM
DOWN AMONG MEN
FATHERLAND

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

The Yellow Lord

BY

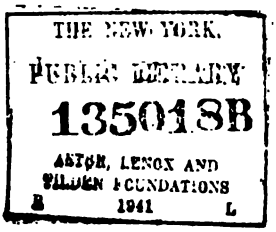
WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

AUTHOR OF "THE HIVE," "MIDSTREAM," "THE LAST DITCH," ETC.



NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY





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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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THE YELLOW LORD



AN OUTSIDE LEAF

FROM the deck of the *Lagnon*, I first saw the little harbour of Magdalena, an isolated Pacific island south of the Lorchering group. Mid-afternoon. I remember a big pile of cocoanuts on one side of the deck, much hempen cordage on the left. The *Lagnon* was steaming along, six or seven knots an hour, very noisy about it, with now and then a wheeze. Though the Skipper denied it, I was pretty sure she had a slight list to the starboard.

He was a young man, new to command, doubtless. His name I recall because easy to remember, Dory Beagle. When I asked him at Charques if he were quite sure about the *Lagnon's* lungs, I actually saw the colour rise under his tan. I knew then that he wasn't ready for humour on the subject of his first ship. The sun was halfway down the slope of afternoon. We were close in shore, that is, within a half

mile. The narrow mouth of the harbour was a rather imposing portal—twin pillar rocks, less than five hundred feet apart, and twice as high. In fact, the cliffs were high almost the full way around the harbour—a strangeness about it all that fascinated, and seemed to have a queer romantic meaning for me especially. I looked through to the broad, white strand in the heavy gold of afternoon.

I had seen such a blue but once before from the north African shore; a deeper and richer delft, this, than the open eastern ocean ever showed. The sparkle of the water held my eyes. There was just one red roof far within —only a go-down possibly, but it made me think of cool claret served in the shadows by some tropical maiden with twilight eyes. Unquestionably a magic about that splendid portal into the blue harbour and the green land, with the rainy season just ended.

I had been much at sea; much at sea with myself. It isn't so long ago, but the passage has been swift since. I, Jack Bowditch, see myself as one far back, standing on the deck of the *Lagnon* that day—a young man, as ripe for punishment as any one loose. My mind dwells

for a moment on that picture in quite an impersonal way—a tall young person in white clothes, doubtless fresh from a bath, burning up cigarettes expensive and exclusive as millinery masterpieces. I dwell upon that figure, flicking a half-smoked Kermashaw over the rail from time to time, and staring through Magdalena's portal toward the red roof that shone like a ruby on the white sand. Its background was verdure; its bath was liquor gold.

"Is it a town?" I asked. Captain Dory Beagle had drawn near.

"No," said he.

"Is it a harbour?"

"Yes," he replied, walking away.

"How do you get in there?" I called, meaning to enquire if the entrance were safe for a ship of the *Lagnon's* draught.

"The most direct way would be to dive overboard and swim for it," Beagle answered.

It wasn't exactly my style of humour, but one meets many varieties around the waterfronts. I recall the exchange only because of later events.

"We have been in there," he added, "but it's tricky. I don't call there if I can help it."

All too fast, the *Lagnon* steamed by that portal. I was sorry when the last of the harbour was closed by the lengthening angle. I had seen the whole sweep of that dazzling inlet. I didn't know it, but Magdalena had put her spell upon me. It was altogether like the tropical island so many of us expect to have to ourselves at the last.

You will smile at my business then. I was a bird-man, no, not a 'plane rider, but a bird-buyer—flamingoes, parrakeets and all those little southern pheasants with colours so gaudy that you wouldn't believe, unless you saw them. There are a lot of queer birds in the jungle that haven't come out yet. There is one that cries in the night. . . . I am sure it's a bird because of the metallic ring in its throat . . . one that cries in the night. I've got to know about that one before I'm done. Birds haven't anything to do with the present narrative, except, possibly, to explain why I was down there among those glittering Archipelagoes. When I get started on the quest for some mystery, there is not much peace for me until it is solved. The devil of it is, so often the interest dies

out as the mystery clears. We are all looking for some bird, or queen or comrade, brand new every day.

. . . That afternoon was endless. I stared back at Magdalena until even the still shadow of her slipped out in a mature golden haze, and my eyes stung from much perfect daylight. Voices in the smoking-room then aroused me, and I realised that these voices had been touching the borders of consciousness for a long time, a dull steady irritation. I moved forward toward them, was greeted jovially and variously as I entered, and as quickly forgotten. Six South Sea men were chatting, with drinks . . . an American from a rice-brewery in Manila; two Russian copra buyers down from Shanghai, the rest English.

Something had turned over inside of me. I don't know if it were a fruition altogether of my own chest, or whether the enchantment of little Magdalena had changed me; in any case the talk in the smoking-room, that I should have laughed at and joined in earlier in the afternoon, bored me now—especially the part about women. . . . Much talk—South Sea



talk, of men who drone like natives, say little and do less—I one of them. I arose presently and a little later found myself staring again over the rail abaft.

1

I READ THE ADVERTISEMENT AND TWICE TAKE SEA PASSAGE

WITHOUT stopping to turn back or tell why, I arise to state that I was broke in Shanghai. It was raining and there had been a thin fall of snow in the night, the last of which was running in the gutters now. In upper Soo Chow Road I passed the door of a Portuguese tobacconist's where formerly I had found an admirable blend of cigarette tobacco, and in whose wicker chairs I had passed an hour or two from time to time.

Now I entered apparently with no other thought than to get in out of the rain. As a matter of fact, it was a turning, as abrupt as my turn from the street to this door,—into a new roadway of life. The tobacconist came forward from the back, nodded to me and re-

turned—his single entrance in this narrative. Over in the shadows by the big wicker chairs was a small low table with a carven teakwood top, and upon this table was yesterday's issue of the *North China News*. I opened its vast pages, close print, no inky flares anywhere, to the section in which yellow, black and white men modestly expressed their desires, their finds and losses, inclinations to work and offers of reward. In the midst of these I came upon the following paragraph, modest as any:

WANTED:—*A number of unencumbered white young gentlemen desirous of dignity and good pay, for management of island estates, tea plantations. Official military war knowledge necessary for qualification. Do not apply unless cultured to house, and gallant of service is contained. No marriage or ancestral dependencies preferred. Apply leisurely, Tsui Tsing Trading Company in Longmead Street, Singapore.*

It was a queer moment. I sort of went "out," as they say, over that advertisement—a peculiar abstraction in which the personality is lost. In that flash it seemed I saw a narrow Chinese

face—very wise, sinister possibly, unreckonable as to years, a deep shine on the chin from some old wound, but distressingly suggestive of the need of a napkin—just a vagary. . . . After that I almost committed to memory the queer collection of expressions in the ad. I could see the blend of the trade mind and the *literati* mind of China—a blend of the dignity of east and west. That was the quality of it. Nothing absolutely of itself—a piecing, a patchwork. "Desirous of dignity and good pay" bored in upon the academic English like the screech of a street coolie in the midst of a courtly function. An hour I sat there. Two or three customers came and went. Presently I discovered that the rain had ceased.

I pinched a corner of the paper, near the advertisement, and tore out a wafer containing it. At the edge of Terrace Drive I picked up a Chinese second-hand dealer who accompanied me to my quarters and presently took away the larger part of my personal possessions, for which I obtained an amount to live graciously for a few weeks longer, including a passage to Singapore.

At Rider's I found that the *Shoreham* was

lying down the river off Woosung; that she would sail for southern ports at six. The old coaster pulled her hooks up out of the yellow water almost exactly on schedule and turned her nose for Hongkong that evening, and one Jack Bowditch was aboard—"unencumbered white young gentleman, no marriage or ancestral dependencies preferred."

For ten days at Singapore, at eleven in the forenoon, I called at the office of the Tsui Tsing Company in Longmead Street and lingered an hour, sometimes lunching with certain Chinese or English officials, equally hard for me to get accustomed to. I was encouraged to believe from day to day that I should be given a post presently, and yet I had received nothing so far but courtesy and postponements of various kinds. I was challenged by the mystery of the whole affair. During the ten days I heard of no one else seeking to be allowed to manage island estates. The conviction grew that the advertisement had not been placed in Singapore; in fact, that it had been printed only in one issue of the *North China News;* that I represented the single response. In the most courteous way I was questioned and tested, but

I had not the faintest idea, during those ten days, of the length and depth of scrutiny and examination to which I was subjected.

From several sources I learned that the Tsui Tsing Trading Company was an ancient Chinese house in lease and possession of many valuable tea plantations, insular and continental. The firm was now operated by European capitalists, but with restrictions of a most peculiar nature retained by descendants of the original Chinese firm-head, Tsui Tsing—the name said to be familiar for half a thousand years along the Asiatic water-fronts, like the name of Tantesoon in Peking. I heard in the city that the survivors of the family were brilliant members of society and empire. I also heard the exact opposite. The whole thing was fascinating as an old ship. I hurry on, for there is much to cover and much to catch by the way.

On the tenth day, as I was leaving the office, the native office manager begged me to remain a few minutes longer this day. At the end of a half hour a young Englishman entered. I took his cool limp hand, and was informed of the name, Mr. Guthrie Catten.

"Thank you, Mr. Catten," I said.

He was a spectacle, confronting me in that quaint old waiting-room overlooking the yellow junk-strewn harbour—tall, narrow shoulders, soft brown beard, and long limp legs tailored in pearl grey tweeds. All in all, he was innocent enough to frighten one—that kind of smooth, unobtrusive suavity that you wouldn't be surprised to find belonging to a scion of royalty or a bank clerk about to be married. Only the eyes were to be excepted. They were blue-grey, with a quizzical, piratical expression that comes from long dalliance under tropic skies. I think I saw in him that instant, somewhat intensified, certain weaknesses and hardnesses of my own.

I didn't like him. I recall that I was afraid of him. I recall that I was instantly aware of a brain and a kind of devil, too. I felt a personality so hard and cool, at least on the surface, that I was left more isolated in his presence than when alone with myself.

We sallied forth into the sunlight, pressed through the noisy mob that closed and eddied about us—go-down coolies, *boy*-children and beggars that plucked at our sleeves. Catten made no explanation, but led the way to Floren-

tine's in Marine Street, where we had *tiffin*. He seemed nervously curious about world affairs and things doing in England since the war began. He hadn't heard accurately about the assaults and defences on either the eastern or western war-fronts, and yet I drew the suspicion that he wasn't showing me anything like his real eagerness.

"I've been over on the island for a few weeks, Bowditch," he said. "I see a white man from time to time, but only trade minds—living Chino, thinking Chino, trading Chino. That's what white men do down here. You'll get a touch of it yourself, Bowditch."

Up to this time in life I was utterly innocent of mercantile affairs; the fact is, I was disturbed a little lest my aloofness from such matters might hurt my standing with the Tsui Tsing people. I told Catten this.

"No, that won't hurt you," he said. "Old Hoy Mon wants a real soldier, a cloak, a plume, a sort of soft-handed tornado-gent."

"Who's Hoy Mon?" I asked.

"Well, Hoy Mon is Tsui Tsing's prime minister over on the island—factotum to the Yellow Lord himself."

"The Yellow Lord?" I repeated.

"That's Tsui Tsing. . . . But tell me, what are the boys doing in the air?"

Thus Catten would launch back to the world war, as I was endeavouring to get light on my advertising quest. As near as I can remember, Catten's interest in my own personality was chiefly what I liked to eat and drink. He had a little saying that he worked in at absurd intervals, to the effect that he hated to drink alone. He appeared to enjoy my culture, as he expressed it, talking of tea, of brews, distillations and evaporations. Later he asked for a particular or two on how I happened to qualify in a military way. The fact is, I had been to school on the Hudson. The military career was cut off in my case at the end of three years by the call of foreign climes and a marvellously attractive young person who would not remain near the Academy. My disgrace at West Point was not serious enough to prevent me from taking on again in the American service, but this was early in the second year of the war, and there was no thought as yet of America drawing cards. Tsui Tsing's service looked as attractive

to me in those early days of the war as a return to Europe.

Catten left me abruptly, saying that if I had no other appointment he would like to see me again in Longmead Street at four, and possibly for dinner in the evening. Promptly at four I was on hand in the Trading office, but was informed that Mr. Catten couldn't be present as he had planned. The next moment I was formally accepted for service in Magdalena, and informed that the steamship *Virgin*, which had just come in from the island this morning, was still lying in the harbour and that Mr. Catten would be glad for me to join him on board for dinner.

I was strolling the deck at seven, waiting for Mr. Catten and revolving the suspicion that it was his coming that decided the company to take me on, when a Chinese touched my arm and asked me to the Captain's quarters. Here I was introduced to the skipper himself, one Abner Hemiter of "Paumanok, Maine, Sir." I remember that his port of hail and the "Sir" were twice repeated with an air of defy against all the powers above or below.

Captain Hemiter was alone. He sat in his

chart-room facing the door as I entered, a gaunt, raw-boned frame of a man—a bearded, frosted face. There was something of actual terror, too, in the stark absence of humour; in the blunt, terrible hands; in the very manner in which the ancient blue cap of office was clamped upon his head like a cylinder-drum. Evidently Hemiter had a fixed set of emotions and a groove in his countenance for each.

Speaking in an awesome rumble, he commanded me to sit. I did so. There was a long silence in which I underwent a most damning scrutiny from a pair of eyes that were the colour of the sea under an east wind. Then he informed me that Mr. *Catten* would be here presently. The unutterable scorn with which he spoke the Englishman's name is wholly indescribable. In the next five minutes, through such subjects as drink, drugs and the godlessness of island women, Catten's utter depravity was discussed. Captain Hemiter explained that he was called to say all this as a warning to me, adding that it was no less than his dead wife would have done, and that she it was who had given him the Word of Salvation twenty years ago.

"Them's her lineaments there on the wall," said he, pointing to a dark framed picture.

. . . I've nothing to say against Mrs. Hemiter. By that likeness I felt she had suffered enough. For two hours I was present while the old skipper was mauled and baited, twisted and guyed by Catten's swift and sharp-fanged faculties. It was brilliant—Hemiter quite innocent that he was being played with—but I had wearied of the man-handling long before dinner was over. I wondered why we had met aboard the *Virgin* instead of ashore. The Tsui Tsing Company and the Island Trading Company, of which the *Virgin* was the flagship, affiliated smoothly, it was said, but our appointment could have nothing to do with commercial courtesy, since Catten had just resigned a stateroom after passage from the island. I would much have preferred to dine ashore, not caring for the brand of guile and banter which Hemiter called from my young English friend, but there was much to learn of a lesser nature. The fact that the *Virgin* was practically the only steamer of account that called at Magdalena Harbour interested me, and that she was the sole medium of trade, supply and mail. I

was yearning to escape from Hemiter's table, when the steward announced the call of an old friend of mine, Captain Dory Beagle of the *Lagnon.*

I hadn't known he was in the vicinity. It appears that there was some meaning after all to this gathering for supper out in the harbour. Catten was to stay in Singapore for ten more days; in fact, until the *Virgin* returned to the island. It was considered advisable for me to report at once to my new headquarters, since there was chance to get there on the *Lagnon.* Captain Beagle, who was taking his ship to the farther Lorcherings, would pass the portal of Magdalena within the next sixty hours, and had consented to set me down at our company's dock. I noted his reluctance, however, and remembered vaguely some unsatisfying conversation with him two years before about how to get in the harbour. Catten had apparently granted the favour done, as soon as asked, according to the mythically free and easy ethics of the South Seas. In any case, I crossed the harbour to town and back to the *Lagnon* with my dunnage that night, and was out on the white water shortly after midnight.

2

I PASS THE NIGHT OUT BY THE PORTAL AND THEN JOURNEY IN TO THE WALLED GARDEN OF THE YELLOW LORD.

I COULDN'T have been right about the lungs of the *Lagnon*, for she was wheezing and snivelling just the same, but apparently no nearer her doom than when I fancied her list two years before. Something in the engine-room went wrong, however, as we neared the Magdalena portal; at least, Captain Beagle said so. Also that it had become necessary for him to make all the speed possible for Port Holy Mary, instead of risking the tricky entrance to Magdalena. Having informed me this much, Captain Beagle paused, and I turned to him patiently to learn where and how I was to be delivered. He said he was slowing down to send a boat ashore presently, and advised me to get my baggage on deck now.

We had passed the Meelcahan Keys, and near enough shore to see the white lines of the surf. The air was still and the sea was merely marking time. I remember hearing that hideous snivel below as I stepped overside to the small boat. They left me off thigh-deep in the surf, a sailor carrying my bags to the beach, holding them high. There was a laugh about it all, though I knew Beagle had reasons of his own for being afraid of entrance. He said I could leave my belongings among the rocks and walk around the shore until I hailed one of Tsui Tsing's servants. . . . He was glad to get rid of me and I didn't mind.

To find myself alone absolutely on the sand to the north of the Portal furnished a thrill I had forgotten was possible. It fanned me to a fine glow inside. The cliffs behind rose straight as a palisade. Less than a quarter of a mile ahead was the break to the harbour entrance, and very leisurely, in the hard sand close to the water, I made my way there with my burdens. Each step of the way I found that I was less anxious to get anywhere in particular at once. There was a stillness and vastness—drink, smoke and a sandwich or two. It was

four in the afternoon when I reached the race and had my first look into the harbour from the shore itself. The old magic was back.

I laughed. I had surely come to a tropical harbour. Something new was in the wind that crossed the still waters—a sweetness that I didn't know much about, but finer than anything before. The thought seemed to come from deep within that this fragrance was a breath from tea-plantations. The two great creamy pillars of the entrance faced each other in understanding silence, like old mates past the need of words.

The whim came to mind not to report until next morning, and it caught on instantly. Back in the shelter of the rocks I built a driftwood fire and passed an evening in the great rhythmic sonance of the waves. A man needs to unfold for himself from time to time like this. It's queer how you have to get alone to find out who you are.

The dawn warmth was palpable before the sun rose. I was hungry, but that day opened like a boy's bright Saturday. The round harbour was unreeling like a master film. It was a shame to take all that beauty alone. I wished

all the movie folks could see the way Nature did it out there in the isolation—always working best away from cities. She arranged light and settings especially her own way that morning—never anything pulled off just like that—a background of mountains, bathed in film, delicate blue hazes that seemed to have all a man wanted in their folds. Old Mother Earth was like a bride. The harbour was clear as a tear-drop, except for a mist of electric blue magic, lying like a drapery over the far edges of the land. I didn't plan to uncover my descriptive prowess as much as this.

On a ledge of rock over the race I lay flat against the inner side of the northern pillar at the turn. Wind and moss—a place where seabirds rested, a sandy ledge, jagged particles flashing hard as emery, a ledge of javelin-dust—as I say, I lay there watching the race in ebb-tide, with the sun as yet invisible, sending mystic messages over the mountain. Long I stared down, twelve or fifteen feet to the water—the harbour emptying herself like a tipped teapot.

There was a kind of song about it, as the water flooded out to sea. The shining stuff looked a mile deep, the sides clean, rock-walled

like a cistern. Staring down in the still joy of fascination, I saw the cliffs change colour, and looked away to the east for the cause of this phenomenon. The sun was coming up over the misty mountains, like the helmet of a conqueror. I think a man only knows one morning like that, as I have a suspicion he only knows, really, one woman—but let it drop at that.

There was fresh water in the rocks, so that I had more than a drink—drew forth razor-case and proceeded to shave with faith in my own fingers. I had not even the mirror of Psyche to go by, the ocean being rough at the time. I never could start anything without a shave. The kid spirit was hot and high in my heart. Carrying my shoes, I circled around to the north of the hard white sand at low tide. The red roof was straight across from the ledge, but the distance by the shore was at least five or six miles. Parts of the harbour water were still shadowed, but above the cliffs there was now divine golden haze, the nearer ledges framed in golden light.

I listened to the birds as I walked. They always pulled my eye and ear. I studied the

trailing vines of the cliffs, bathed in beautiful light, meanwhile approaching the red-roofed warehouse on the water-front. The tin had been freshly covered with a ruby metal paint of wonderful lustre. I remembered a corner in Fifth Avenue, New York, with a roof like that, and white walls with flowered windows. Close by in shore, seemingly in a dock of her own, lay a beautiful auxiliary yacht of six hundred tons—possibly a private conveyance of Tsui Tsing himself. At two points above I saw a wall jutting down to the edge of the cliffs. Then I remembered that Catten had said Tsui Tsing lived in a walled garden.

On the southern side for a space the land rose leisurely from the shore into a most alluring hill country, but the rest was steep-walled, almost like a shallow tin cup. Beyond the auxiliary and between the two ends of the wall to the east, I perceived a roman road carved upon the cliffs—the trail, beyond a doubt, to Tsui Tsing's walled garden. I saw presently that my way ahead passed between the godown with the ruby roof and the dock of the steamer. Here I anticipated the formality of making myself known, but at first the Chinese

working among the fragrant tea chests in the cool of the morning merely eyed me as I passed. I supposed the steamer deserted, until a distinguished looking Oriental appeared from below, scraping the excess tobacco from an unlit cigarette with a long finger nail. I raised my hand to him, and he brushed the sleeves of his delicate white flannel coat, before signifying that he was aware of my presence.

"I have come from Singapore——"

"You fly?" he said quickly, darting in the question in a way that broke my sentence in two. He made signs of looking at the sky for my airboat, and otherwise showed himself delighted with his humour and personality.

"From Singapore," I repeated, "to report to one Hoy Mon——"

"I am Soling Wai," he said.

"Forgive me for not knowing before."

"They know me at Singapore," he said concernedly.

"Of course."

Soling Wai now informed me, as if indulging in a most excruciating bit of humour, that he was first engineer of the—what I took to be the *Jeez-bo*—in any case the name of this most

entrancing clipper-built auxiliary. I told him how grateful I was for his confidence, and found him regarding intently the soft gold-brown boots in my hand. They were particularly fine affairs and I made up my mind to give them to Soling Wai when my bags were brought. He wished to know if we flew barefoot these days, and then offered me a chair on deck to dress my feet once more. . . . From where I sat, looking out over the harbour, I could see a big drum buoy marked "Island Trading Company"—the anchorage of the *Virgin* doubtless. As I stared around from the portal to the wall-ends, it occurred to me with a smile that we had a miniature world here on Magdalena. All that we needed was to start something in the way of a war to get in the big beat of the rest of the world.

Soling Wai liked me better with my shoes on, and proffered a cigarette. After much description and minute detail he sent two Chinese for my outfit, *cached* away back at the portal rocks. Also he informed me that I need only keep on going up the ledge trail, and continuing through one grove of pepper trees and crossing one compound to come to the castle and

headquarters of Tsui Tsing himself—Hoy Mon never far off from his Master. Soling Wai then dismissed me with a compliment to himself which I encouraged.

Passing on, I found that the name of the steamer was not the "*Jeez-bo*," but the *Jezebel.* The roman road on the cliff was wide enough for an ox-cart. After a steady climb of ten minutes, I began to remember that I had taken my holiday without food to speak of. At the top I found the tropic morning in all its golden burning reality. Somehow the boy-stuff lingered in my chest, and the broad low castle of the Yellow Lord shone like Parian marble ahead through the pepper trees. . . . The air was sweet and hot, and I caught the wonderful breeze from the tea-lands again. While I was still a half thousand yards away, a sentry door in the great gate opened and a huge Chinese figure emerged, bare of breast, slow of movement, yet apparently excited, vast-muscled, white-trousered and carrying a broad helmet. His emerging was that of one who has discovered a fire within the premises and was rushing forth for assistance. This idea was presently spoiled by a group of Orientals fol-

lowing rather helplessly. It was like a bull-fight preliminary—much sparring. They watched the vast person, who did not continue in my direction, but rushed here and there, avoiding all hands stretched to take him, more as in a child's game than in battle. Queerly I got the sense of some twitch or lack of co-ordination in his muscles—that he was running from some chaos or outrage in his own brain. Presently he disappeared around the rear wall, the Chinese following.

I sat down at the edge of the compound and waited until a white man, grey hair and moustache, face a bit flamed, came forward, enquiring if there was anything he could do. I saw at once that he had expected to find a beggar or beach-comber; in any case he seemed to know that the peace of his world was somehow disturbed by my coming.

My eyes were called to him as we advanced together toward the gate. Meanwhile I explained enough for him to grasp what appeared to be the worst—that I had come to stay. His name was Major Holt, and he told me that the Secretary, Hoy Mon, was doubtless the man for me to see first, but that Hoy Mon was oc-

cupied just now with unforeseen and altogether unusual affairs. It devolved upon him therefore to conduct me to a place of rest and refreshment. I couldn't get over the idea that all this was very arduous to Major Holt, who showed me, however, to a little bungalow on the compound near the castle, which I considered right hospitable of him, especially when I found it admirably fitted and arranged within. Major Holt then rather deftly enquired about the breakfast situation in my case, and left me wearily, something pathetic about the ruin of his military figure and the lingering aggressiveness of the white moustache.

Presently the taps began at my door, on each occasion a different servant, always Chinese—each time a separate service, hot water, towels, soap, reading matter, cigarettes, shoes, ample buffet matters, a wheeled table bearing many viands, and at last, a covered cage, very gently handled by a warm-hearted domestic on tiptoe, who carried it to the window and hung it up on a hook. I removed the cover and gazed upon a beautiful pair of marigold *pintinnies*, very rare except in the twilight jungles of the Lorcherings. The male bird began singing at

once. . . . A browned fish, a deep-green salad, a pot of perfect coffee, and I sat by the window, feet comfortably elevated to the sill, surveying them approvingly from time to time, and the castle across and the song-birds above my head. After long, the sound of a piano from across the compound.

3

I PENETRATE FRAGRANT SHADOWS TO FIND A WOMAN AND I BATTLE WITH AN EFFIGY ON THE SAME DAY.

IT was that inimitable waltz from Tschaikovsky's *Eugen Onegin*. Hearing it two or three years before in New York had left an unfilled cup within ever since. A player-piano, possibly, but I listened full-souled, like the hushed birds in the cage above my head. Always a bit of music or a perfume or a woman's voice brings the truth like a gust to a man's heart, how lonely he is, how helpless after all. . . . Gradually it dawned that this wasn't a player-piano—that no automatic player could do just this—at least, none that I had ever heard. Here was form and fulness and personality in every bar. It was matched to the moments as they glistened by. It had something to say to me that no plate, or

disk, or record could ever tell. There was air, earth, water and fire in the story—a figure forming in a kind of glowing dusk.

I was standing. I went to the door and out to the little porch of the bungalow. The sound came from one of the screened and darkened windows of the so-called castle. I crossed the compound and stood near, would have gone around and entered from the inner side, except for the big Gate.

A Chinese touched my arm now with deference, saying that Hoy Mon was ready to make my acquaintance. He led me through the sentry-door of the Gate and through a richly flowered and palm-shaded court to the small outer office of the Secretary to the Yellow Lord. An elderly man with much dignity and mystery, Hoy Mon, a shiny scar upon his chin and glint of green to his eyes. Many brushes and pencils and small perfect implements were about him, and many cabinets, keys to which he kept queerly at his heart, under the brocade of his blouse. The place was darkened from the day, but there was a little gold electric lamp shaded in bronze leaves above his shaven head, and I caught the greenish tinge to the gold of his

tightly drawn skin from the reflection. Of course, his eyes answered to the same light. He wore a jade triangle, point downward on his breast, and I had a queer impulse always to restore it to its proper position, like the everlasting hills. There was a flash of green in the velvet insets of his faultless slippers, and the rest of the green was atmosphere rather than pigment.

"You came from Singapore?"

I explained.

"Why you come?"

I told him of the advertisement.

"Do you like it here?"

There was a flicker across the green eyes of Hoy Mon when he asked certain questions, like the wing of a bird obscuring the sunlight for a fraction of an instant.

"Yes. I have felt a new pull to life."

"Pull to life? You are like our Mr. Catten, who is a living idiom."

For several moments I explained about the military qualifications and all, occasionally enjoying the flicker across the green eyes, but I found it was no use trying to elucidate to an Oriental mind the new pull to life—that I was

loose like a boy, working out a tale of land and sea adventure; that I was secretly proud of the intrinsic zest of living I had found hanging over in my blood in this late day. . . . He raised his left hand in gesture as he intoned brief sentences to his staff, allowing me to see the long-nailed fingers under the trailing sleeve. I was then escorted to the court and permitted to sit under the palms for service of libation, as Hoy Mon said.

The piano began again. I was quite alone and arose, crossing the court. A Chinese appeared, asking if I wished anything, but I nodded brusquely. Another touched my arm, but called forth only impatience. The door from whence the sounds came was open, but a screen partially covered the aperture. It was very shadowy within after the stinging sunlight of the court . . . still I looked in. This wasn't my way exactly. You'd have to know how thirsty and hungry I was for music to understand. A long low-shaded room, bamboo branches waving at the window, a full-sized concert-instrument robed in maroon velvet as a protection against the tropic humidity, and a

white lifted face turned slightly to the curtain which I held apart.

Her hands kept on playing.

It must have seemed strange to her . . . two of the house-servants at my elbows, I in slippers and a bit wild-eyed from the music; awe and reverence partially disguised in American laughter. Whatever she felt at that moment could not compare with the vague revelations to me of her beauty. I was conscious of fear, a kind of ecstasy, and over all a heavy door seemed opened for me to enter, a door into some new slavery.

I have heard other men say the same thing about a beautiful face. The first feeling akin to fear that I had known for a long time came to me that instant. It was as if I had been assigned by fate, long ago, and was powerless now to turn aside.

I had flipped a cigarette over the side of the *Lagnon*, from many another ship, from many a window, with a laugh and a sense of mental freedom, rather dwelling with the idea that I was my own master if ever a man was. But I was not my master from that moment. She did not know. She does not know yet, but she

had something like orders from the Top for me. Loyalty, life itself, was hers—just a white lovely face in the shadow.

Her hands kept on playing.

The two Chinese waited for her gesture, still touching my elbows. She smiled and excused them, and then came forward to me.

"Play it again," I said.

She turned obediently, and there were five or seven minutes in which I only touched the fringes of time and space. She seemed inwardly joyous to have some one listening. The faintest colour dawned in her face, uplifted and shining with its inner light. I could see that she had learned to put everything away excepting the inmost wonder of a rare moment like this. She seemed to delight in the strangeness of it all—my coming unannounced to the house, to the music-room, in fact, my presence in that isolated harbour.

She was all that I asked.

You remember how I set out to describe the sun-up on Magdalena Bay, but fell down badly? I am not going to undertake anything of the kind now, only to say that this girl had it all—dark brown hair, eyes that looked into



you, smiled and were always on the verge of disclosing something you were not quite ready for—eyes that didn't take fear quite seriously, but made much out of the big warm laugh at life—throat and lips and all, matters of perfection, infinitely satisfying on the one hand, and yet bringing me that soul-deep fear on the other.

The rest was that lustrous pallor that shone in the dusk. I think that was the point of it all—the pallor that glows deep underneath, a spiritual quality. By the time she had finished the waltz I was a doomed man—bound and delivered. Even she could not set me free.

You see now why I pressed down rather heavily on that wide-open, kid-adventure spirit since leaving the *Lagnon*. You may enquire why she could not set me free. I knew the answer before she stopped playing. I might be bound and gagged, and carried away to some desolate stretch of coast, put on a tramp steamer and conveyed to uttermost parts . . . but the quest of this loveliness would be the same.

I heard myself thanking her. She listened critically, her hands in her lap. She seemed to

want to know my authority for praising her; as if she didn't mind particularly either way, but would prefer that I knew what I was talking about. The fact that I knew what she was playing was a stroke. The little waltz thing wasn't so broadly known in America then. . . . No questions as to how I had come, nor what for. I wondered at this, when she said:

"And you mean to stay here with us?"

I nodded, more than ever positive that I had found a mission in Magdalena. I wanted to tell her how I had felt passing by the portal the first time on the *Lagnon's* deck, but it seemed a trifle extraneous.

"The word came to us here this morning that a white man was on a walking-tour around the island," she observed.

I laughed inwardly at the animation in her eyes. I saw that she had a mental picture of a man walking at the extreme edge of the strand, boots swung over his shoulders. Doubtless I had been observed before my converse with Soling Wai, though I had perceived no one. There was not a trace of a smile on her lips, nor even around her eyes, but the eyes themselves—all the story was told. I saw her joy

at the coming of a stranger, though there appeared a complication about it. She gave me her hand when I told her my name and said:

"I am Major Holt's daughter—Chireen Holt——"

"Chireen—" I repeated.

"It's a Persian name," she added. "My father and mother were in Persia when I came. He was called Ameer John Holt."

"What does it mean—*Chireen?*" I asked.

She laughed a little and the suffusion of colour was very dear even in the dusk, but the answer was finished:

"It's a Persian name that means *sweet.* My mother liked it."

It seemed we took a step nearer together. Just then I heard a high-pitched laugh from an uncertain distance, and from an opposite way the angry growling of a dog. Chireen's hand came out as if to touch mine. It was not horror, but helplessness, which I saw in her face now, and a kind of grey weariness. A queer moment; I remember her expression vividly even now, yet at the same time, my faculties were trying to picture the human being that went with that laugh. There was something

petty and cruel about it that can only be suggested. I had the vague feeling that one must be somehow dehumanised to cope with the force behind that laugh.

"I think I like your name very much," I said slowly.

There was silence, then the laugh again. The girl said oddly:

"I was thinking that it might be best for you not to be seen, unless——"

Just then a servant from Hoy Mon asked for me, and I drew back from Chireen, enquiring:

"Are you quite safe?"

"Oh, yes, though this is unusual. We must not talk now——"

It was like cracking one's tendons to turn around and leave the music-room.

"I've got to hear you play again," I whispered from the door.

Her hands lifted sensitively, as if she listened with them, then in gesture pressed me forward faster. A Chinese servant in the court caught my fingers lightly, and quickened my steps back, across and forward to the South gate, where he bade me wait. I stood there for

several seconds, and my whole thought was of Chireen Holt. . . . No woman had ever taken me over like this. I tried to picture her before me here, as I had left her a moment ago, but I could remember perfectly only her hands. . . .

Hoy Mon, looking very white and weary, emerged from the forward room nearest the Gate, and, thrusting his arm through mine, led me out into the compound and across to the bungalow I had recently left.

"Excuse me—excuse me, Mr. Bowditch, but there is perhaps at once help which you can be of benefit—I do not doubt——"

"Lead on," said I.

Hoy Mon added that Major Holt was not well, and that Jerry Comitu was away in the fields. Four or five Chinese house-servants were at the front door, but their hands and arms looked helpless. I saw that they didn't relish much the work at hand. . . . Now I heard a threshing about inside, and it dawned upon me that some one was loose in there—possibly the same figure I had seen at large this morning at the moment of arrival. . . . Presently the laugh again. There was emptiness in the sound of one trying to be jovial. A man

learns to control a repulsion, but there was that for this creature in every cell of my being just then.

"We will go in," said Hoy Mon, pushing back the Orientals at the door.

A vast round face, indescribably young for such bulk, Chinese, but rough-haired, without a queue—a monster, broad, thick, tall, tallowy features, clay-white teeth, yet a glistening brightness to the eye. The last feature made one think of certain drug effects, or the look of a rodent, a beady brightness which made the havoc of mind a conspicuous fact in his face. I heard Hoy Mon breathe:

"It is very unfortunate——"

The effigy was standing by my buffet, and the point of mirth about it all was his abandonment among the liquors. He glanced at me over the rim of a glass. I won't forget that first look, nor the queer odour I detected as I stepped nearer. His lips moved, but there was no sound, and when he had drunk, tongueing the rim of the glass obscenely, he placed it down with deep satisfaction and came forward with round soft movements. Meanwhile his eyes did not leave me, not contacting mine, but hover-

ing, so to speak, about my forehead and cheeks and throat. I felt horror rather than fear, and Hoy Mon kept up an incessant and nervous chatter of nothings at my left.

The great creature reached out his wet hands and pawed me, the movements wide like an infant's. Then he appeared to perceive Hoy Mon for the first time, and took him, not roughly at all, by the shoulders and lifted him forth to the front door, which he locked in a loose leisurely fashion before returning to me. I now realised that the windows were screened and barred, and that the far door of the room was already bolted. The human ruin approached me again, hands out, to continue his examination, head and shoulders waving queerly like the head of a worm making a suspension from a twig.

I broke a bit in the nervous tension and thrust the soft hands away, but they returned. I repeated my action a trifle roughly. The creature drew back. I saw the mouth straighten, quiver and harden into a bestial curve. The right hand was raised above me but loosely, the fingers stretched apart, then forked swiftly at my eyes. His two nails and stiffened fingers

struck my averted face. I pulled him to me. My heart sank a bit that first instant. He was like a stack of hempen cordage, and from the great revolting chest, as I pressed into it, now began the most abominable outcries, having nothing to do with words.

4

IN WHICH THE BATTLE IS CONTINUED, AND I PASS THE EVENING WITH JERRY COMITU, FORMERLY OF DUANE STREET, NEW YORK.

BY all means an unholy moment, and yet, over the shoulder of my antagonist, in the first strain of combat, I saw the ocean beyond the harbour in the sunlight, deep blue and calling. Also, always listening for bird-noises, I heard, at the same time, the huddle and flutter of the caged pair above in the window, as if a serpent were gliding near. Then—running feet and voices outside . . . faces at the windows.

He was an utter brute. His hands pressed like flatirons into my back. I seemed to forget myself and all that I knew about this sort of fight thing. The laugh remained with me, and a sense of blood in the throat and back of the eyes—a smell of blood in my nostrils from the

strain. Peculiarly enough, the idea of finishing him did not occur. I merely let go—let him carry my weight as he struggled; that is, all that he did in the way of punishment was over and above the burden of my hundred and seventy pounds. I leaned on him, but met his aggressiveness lightly. The touch of him chilled me with loathing and crippled rather than aroused, in this first moment. Hoy Mon was calling—something laughable about that.

There was a doubt about my having the force to hurt him. He must have had fifty or sixty pounds the better in weight. I knew the peculiar experience of hearing the blood rushing in my own body, between the thumps of the heart, as one suddenly entering a building where many electric contrivances are in full action, or when forcibly held under water. . . . Still the disinclination to put him out.

The crook of his arm raised upward and across my shoulder, my chin pinned against his collarbone. Now the fork of his arm back of my head flattened my throat against his hardened shoulder muscle. With my free hand I parried as well as possible the heavy blows which he began with his right against my waist

and ribs. We were all about the room. One thing after another was overturned and broken. Once we were sprawled on the floor, without releasing the clinch; twice we were rocked half way. A bone in my left hand snapped in meeting his mallet-like blow from the side. Yet, it was only when his head crushed against the bird-cage, adding a last torture to the fright of the poor creatures, that I lost the laugh altogether. . . . The woman's voice without:

"Break open the door!"

He looked like a gorilla to me in that moment—all that was loathly and abominable, as I pressed my free hand against his face. It flattened his nose, shutting off his breath. He writhed his whole body to be free. All this time sounds, but no words. I must have known all the time that he was incapable of enduring pain. Possibly that explains in part the mystery of my non-resistance. A great moan was in the room. . . . His body curved up to mine as he pulled back his head for air. His shirt had been torn from him. Before my eyes, in that instant, I saw the fork of the triangle between his floating-ribs. From a distance not

more than eight inches I tapped that vulnerable part.

I had seen the thing done. It was given to the world by an old ringmaster. Much has been learned about the solar plexus in later years. To rock that big central ganglia means for the moment to shatter the whole human system. I think one who falls under an impact there, knows what pain means. For a fraction of a second, the Chinese lay screaming on my arm. I did not let him fall—rather allowed him to sink easily, completely unconscious. The light blow, since I had struck it exactly right, had sent him out as easily as one kills a rabbit with a tap of a stick behind the ears.

All seemed stillness about me until the door crashed open. I pushed Hoy Mon aside and glanced at the eyes of Chireen Holt. Some meaning of ages passed between us. I can't explain what it meant to me—something of fang and jungle and claw and club—a battle of giants in some smoky wilderness for the body of a boar or for the allegiance of some dusky maid.

She came forward, her hand out, her eyes

upon the prone figure now silent, his eyeballs distended, his mouth open and obscene.

"Did you have to kill him?" she asked huskily.

"No. He will be up in a moment."

"What did you do? Ah, it does not matter —but what does it mean? You are unhurt?"

I must have been dangling my left hand queerly, for she pointed quickly to that, saying:

"Except for your hand. What has happened?"

"Just a trifle—I don't know yet. I was a bit careless with it."

She was speaking in exhaustion:

"It was so strange. The door gave so slowly —it seemed ages to me. I pictured you down. Somehow I could not see anything but his huge, horrible strength. . . . I think I lost track of the blows against the door."

"I heard your voice," I said.

I looked from her to Hoy Mon and the servants standing about, their faces clear in the half-light, the yellow cast accentuated into white by the shadow, as yellow paint comes out white in the films. If you can believe it,

some warmth and sunlight seemed to be stealing into my world again. It was all bigger than I knew possible. I felt again the thing she had brought me before, an exhilaration and a sense of pain.

Then a low moan began on the floor.

Scarcely fifteen seconds had passed since I let him down, in spite of the enactment of the heart mystery. My wish was to divert Chireen's gaze from the spectacle of that huge creature's pain. Nothing is so terrible as the sight of a child's fright delineating itself upon features partly covered by a beard. The eyes that had burned so brightly were empty as a polar sea.

"For God's sake, get out of here. He's going to cry," I said.

She turned obediently, as she had done when I asked her to play, only I heard from her lips as she pushed her way out among the Chinese:

"I have heard him cry before."

That was a long afternoon. Hoy Mon and his servants had taken care of the sick one and straightened up the bungalow in the compound, which I now ascertained was to be my

quarters. I had to smile at the sudden deference of the Chinese in service around the castle. Simple folk under a few folds of guile. A bit of strength and speed appeared to have won their worship. They were a pale looking lot, altogether too attenuated and house-broke, I thought, not realising at the time what was wrong. Hoy Mon was inexplicable. He appeared to have some reservations about my greatness. As I consider it well, Hoy Mon usually had a reservation.

I washed and redressed with some difficulty. A right hearty bit of pain began in my hand an hour or so after the fracture. The nerves did not really begin to hit it up until after that lull. The Chinese brought me all the delicacies of the shore and the hills and the skies. That feast would have lasted until late afternoon had I not called for coffee before and refused to entertain further trays. I can say authoritatively that they knew how to prepare the dainty little birds, the fishes and the sweets of the land.

Toward dusk I walked through the pepper trees to the edge of the cliff overlooking the harbour. The setting sun touched the portal

of Magdalena, and I watched the splendid spires darken and lengthen across the inner side. My thoughts must have gone far adrift, for I remember recalling with pleased surprise that the ruby-roof of the go-down below in the shadows was the same that had called me long ago from the offing. . . . Yes, it had called from the deck of the *Lagnon* that day. It held me now. I was learning to love Magdalena Bay.

Back in my quarters I found that the caged *pintinnies* had been badly used in the recent encounter. They seemed slowed-up for all time from fright—not a note from them—shrinking close together, their eyes filmy. . . . Sitting by the window, trying to get a line on the handling of this particular pain, I wondered how the woman fared. Something desolate crept in with the night and the reaction. . . . A big voice in the compound, a quick knock at the door, and a rather formidable stranger appeared there with a laugh and a hand extended.

"Mr. Bowditch, they tell me," he began. "I am Jerry Comitu. . . . Comitu, yes. . . .I keep tab on the field-bosses. . . . Chinos do best under a white man's gad, Mr. Bowditch."

Past fifty, but an interesting ruffian—nar-

row waist, broad shoulders, rakish handling of himself, fierce moustache and a glittering eye. He helped himself to a drink and remarked that my sideboard hadn't begun to be stocked yet; and everything would be right in this regard when Catten got back.

"Only a few of us whites on the island," he explained in a manner that intimated he was glad to set me straight on certain external affairs.

I told him that I had some difficulty in getting the inter-relations ordered in my mind.

"Only eight of us," he went on. "Catten and you, Major Holt and his son and daughter, my woman and my girl, Magda, and myself. Catten lives next door to you. Holt and myself with our people are quartered in the castle."

Comitu then informed me as a kind of added favour that Major Holt was ageing rapidly, not the man he was, by any means; couldn't take a drink and forget it as he used to. I saw that my caller relished this subject, so I discouraged it, asking questions about the island. Presently Comitu wanted to talk about the solar

plexus stuff, which was even more painful to me. He lurched forward in his seat, saying:

"Good heavens, man, don't apologise! They say it was clean-cut. . . . A few of that kind might effect a cure. His spells aren't getting any fewer or lighter."

"Who is he, Mr. Comitu?" I enquired.

My friend jerked his chin in, darted his head around at me like a bird, then looked down from squared and lifted shoulders.

"Eh?" he said.

"Who is the unfortunate? . . . I noted that Hoy Mon seemed queerly tender about him."

Comitu roared with laughter, repeating from time to time in his paroxyms—"tender." I waited patiently to learn that my blow had closed a periodical rampage of the Yellow Lord himself.

"Perhaps I'd better go next ship," I remarked.

"No, it's all right," he assured me. "Hoy Mon's mighty delicate about him, but took it all right. He was there, I understand, and appeared to have some idea of the—what would you call it—pathological reaction? . . . No, I

assure you, it was approved. The fact is, you wouldn't wait for the next ship if it wasn't—that is, if you killed the Yellow Lord."

"What would befall, so to speak?" I enquired.

"We're a long ways out on the water and all that," Comitu declared after a dramatic pause, "but the laws of China hold out here when it comes to killing an out-and-outer like Tsui Tsing. . . . Hoy Mon would regret the necessity of the undertaking, but have your life, as a matter of duty."

"Well, well," said I. "And this, you say, was part of the periodical breakout!"

"Ah, yes. Only from time to time, Tsui Tsing gets loose. . . . Very quiet and wonderful most of the time—marvellous judgment and commercial genius, best tea-man in the world. Very quiet, Mr. Bowditch, never a peep out of him most of the time."

I had glanced often into the big Latin face (though Comitu said he was American) during his sketch of the Yellow Lord, but I couldn't detect the reason for his giving me a wrong point of view, if that was his purpose; nor could I understand big capacity of any

kind in the man I had fought with. I let the whole affair rest lightly and was carried off to dinner to Comitu's quarters. . . . During the evening I was amused to find that Major Holt was only superficially friendly with Comitu's household; in fact, that the two men were opposed at every point and both were soldiers of fortune long used to Asia and the South Seas. Comitu's wife was a sallow, fearful sort, inclined to be hysterically tender and absolutely convinced that she could do nothing right. The daughter, Magda, was mighty pleasing to look at—rather a flash in detail, but had a rake to her shoulders like her father, and was predisposed to boyish sports and affairs which always induced gentle apathy, where I was concerned.

Altogether the evening supplied many things about the island, but as I think to put them down, I am surprised at the external nature of all statements—nothing that really mattered or let me into the establishment's arcanum. I tried to learn why an "unincumbered white gentleman" was worth good pay and unquestionable dignity in Magdalena, but nothing that satisfied me came. Comitu could be cryp-

tic. He explained in the same mysterious unreadable fashion as he had spoken of Tsui Tsing's remarkable points, that "our" company was seeking quietly to interest some English capital (the holders liable to appear on any arrival of the *Virgin*), and that Tsui Tsing fancied he could add tone to his establishment by the presence of a few Europeans and Americans to handle the Chinese. This of course failed to satisfy. I learned that Catten had been in the Yellow Lord's service for two years, and that he had been to Singapore only once before his present trip.

There was said to be five or six hundred male natives on the island—mixture of Malay and Singalese, but we whites of the Yellow Lord's establishment were completely folded in by his Chinese, two hundred in all, including the field hands, and no womenfolk. There were at least three master-chefs in the castle *ménage*. Comitu expected much, but granted that there were things done with game and fish designed to make a man forget that life here is a vain and passing show. He was really interesting when he talked about the plantations and the island itself, seeming to have a joy in the fields and

hills and at least a patronising friendliness about the natives.

"Curious little devils," he muttered. "They need a white man over them."

I recalled that he had said that about the Chinese, too.

"I'll take you over to see old Labulamo, their chief," he added. "That lardy old pelican, Labulamo—got brains, too, brains in the right place between the eyes, not all in the back of his neck."

Not such a bad evening, after all—a little long, a little draggy, and a lot of pain in the hand. . . . I was listening deep from time to time, a lamp deep within burning that had never been lit before. At last, toward midnight, I heard a few bars of the waltz from Tschaikovsky's *Eugen Onegin*—an extraordinary effect in that still house. Comitu arose and sat down again. I was weary of his talks—even his talk of hidden treasure, a mania of the man.

"One of the Chinese *boys* with the player-piano," he explained glibly. "You would be amazed how these Orientals love a white man's music."

I nodded. My hand lifted for him to with-

hold his words so I could listen. . . . She only played for a moment or two. I had a faint hope that it was a signal to me, a bit of enticing ingenuity for my peace of mind.

"The fact is, I should like to hear that Chinese play more," I said. "One gets pretty dry for an earful of music down in this country."

5

A MORNING WALK DOWN TO THE *JEZEBEL* AND FURTHER REVEALING TALK WITH JERRY COMITU, WHO DREAMS OF SUNKEN TREASURE.

I LAY awake. . . . Music, meeting, battle, the vagrant confidences of Jerry Comitu, then the good-night message from the piano. It meant that to me now. The waltz would always have a different meaning. The deeper wonder of life flooded over me when I thought of Chireen Holt across the compound. This was almost like passing the night in the same house with her for the first time. Any lover has not the full story who has missed that thrill. My mind was sore at the merest image of the Yellow Lord. The hours since had wearied me more than the battle. There seemed some lingering breath of him about me that I could not escape.

The northern world, the western world, New York, Chicago, California, the big trade world, the mad monster of a world that I had listened to with such zest and fervour during many days in the tropical orient—all seemed remotely far that night. Everything was different since that music in the morning. The fact of having found the woman here put the lights out from far mental horizons—lights that I had stared at so long. I think I must have looked afar for the big comrade all these years.

I rolled and stared across the compound, all dazzling in the moonlight, a sparkling night. There was no atmospheric movement. The stillness actually aroused me. It was as if I lay in the ventricle of the heart of one of the Pyramids. A little more silence, I thought, and one would feel the roll of the planet bowing eastward. . . . At the end of it, before the bird-songs of morning, I dreamed that Chireen tapped at my door.

I had never been so tired. The battle yesterday, unparalleled emotions so far as I was concerned, the sleepless hours—I had to laugh to find that the steam had gone from my limbs. I was forced to drop down. Right there on the

ground-floor of exhaustion, so to speak, fears about the woman began to come. Imagination running loose, and properly goaded by pain and the terrors of a mind utterly tired, combine to use up the balance of any one's vitality. I lay there fanning myself cool with sheer will force. It can be done. A man once told me that there was not anything living or dead fit for a human being to be afraid of. The more I think about that, the more I realised it to be true, but we have to give up being afraid for others, after we win over fear in our own cases. No man who followed Tschaikovsky's waltz as I had done, and found his vision at the end of it, is likely ever to be lost altogether in himself again.

I was better presently; every sense was keen with the consciousness of dawn. The smell of the sea came in. The dawn wind rustled the thin foliage at the window. I dressed and went out quietly, through the pepper-grove again to the ledge-trail. The harbour was grey with a trailing mist. The moon had lost her mystery. She was speeding down over the sea to the north of the portal—the secret of her ghostliness already revealed. A step presently,

and I turned to find Magda Comitu hurrying to me. She was like her father in being able to be interested only in her own things—innocently so, not making any attempt to open her mind to the affairs of others. There was pained anxiety upon her face as she came close.

"Did you see Guthrie Catten in Singapore?"

"Yes, Miss Magda."

"Why didn't he come back with you?"

"He didn't tell me definitely, only that there was work for him and that he would wait for the *Virgin*."

"Did he say he'd surely come on the *Virgin* next trip?"

"That was his plan, though he made no actual promise."

"Did he give you any message?"

"Why, I was almost a stranger, Miss Magda, and the time was very short——"

She left abruptly, just as Chireen's brother, Lance, sped by at the end of a leather thong, to which was attached his very serious and sizeable she-hound, Shiela. I waved at the lad and started down the roman road to the harbour level. The day was stealing in with a shy loveliness all its own—a queer feminine qual-

ity that I never noticed before at daybreak; something delicately revealing in perfume and redolence that a man only senses in his world after a meeting such as mine yesterday.

I walked around the shore toward the red-roofed go-down, taking in the *Jezebel's* lines of beauty. She looked brigantine to me in her main design. Yesterday I had been disappointed to find that she carried gas engines, for the unfolding of canvas was pure enchantment in my case. The go-down was locked, and this, of course, blocked the passage to the ship's rail. No gangway was down, even in the enclosed area—no chance to board from where I stood, for her shapely stern was twenty feet out from the dock. Every additional moment of acquaintance filled me with fresh admiration for the little craft, absolutely flawless in every detail, though from where I stood by her stern hawser I could catch the stale smell of the black smoke. Even here the Chinese had their "den" aft. I hadn't detected this yesterday. And now under the awnings appeared Soling Wai lighting a cigarette.

"You no sleep?" he enquired.

I held up my lame hand and he grunted cheerfully.

"You no sleep," he repeated quietly, settling the fact for himself. "You want to come up here—look-see pretty boat?"

I nodded and he turned back amidship, let himself over the side and presently unlocked the big gate of wire and planking that let me into the boarding area. Soling Wai was rather superb in his morning gown, and conscious of his freshness like a favoured steward. I always had to be reminded that he was engineer. Evidently the gossip had reached the *Jezebel* from the compound since yesterday, for Soling Wai grunted quaintly again, and undertook to pay me a compliment in terms of American humour. Lifting my good hand up, and pressing his belt with a painful expression, rolling his eyes, he remarked that a man like me needed only one hand. This I took to be his comment on the solar-plexus affair yesterday. It left me depressed. He was watching me closely. It is hard to catch the ordinary Chinese in this, but I realised that the engineer was sleepless for the rights and possessions of the Yellow Lord. I saw several other Chinese below, but when I

enquired for the Captain, I was informed that he was in Singapore—Mr. Catten, the commander of the *Jeez-bo*.

Soling Wai seemed ready to discuss the morning with me, and yet I felt, somehow, that he was just as ready to put me in irons. I couldn't shake off the feeling that I was out of place. Now Comitu appeared at the back of the locked wicker, and I felt a sudden frost in the manner of Soling Wai, who conducted me to the exit. Comitu bawled out jovially that he was hunting me up for breakfast . . . that he missed Catten and much preferred a little walk in the morning to immediate sitting down to table. I nodded to Soling Wai as the gate swung, and was carried away in a high formless drift of words.

From it all as we walked toward the ledge trail, I drew that Comitu had a confession to make—that he had taken a fancy to me. He was a boy, a great boy, possibly a great bad boy. I didn't feel my morals flourishing themselves in Magdalena—that is, away from Chireen Holt. I saw that Comitu wanted things, and didn't have enough to do, and drank and ate too much, and had lingered too long in the

tropics, and didn't have any particular reverence for his family life, though a kind of savage idolatry for Magda . . . all this to explain that I took his words about fancying me with a bit of testing acid.

"Did you go below?"

I was at a loss for a minute; his question was so sudden and harked back so queerly to my stepping aboard the *Jezebel*.

"No."

"Ever see soft gold?"

I shook my head.

"Gold that you can carve with your thumbnail?"

"No. Has the *Jezebel* got a cargo of that stuff?"

"Not yet, Bowditch—not yet. . . . She would have," he added unwarily, "if I had her. You haven't been long in the tea business?"

"No. It's rather exciting, though, this first twenty-four hours——"

"It'll drag before long. It has to me. I came down here looking for treasure——"

"You've always looked for treasure, haven't you?" I asked, recalling some intimations he had made the night before of early days be-

tween the Americas, sailing out from both sides of the Isthmus.

"Come to think of it—yes, I've always looked for treasure. . . . Say, Bowditch, didn't you ever open a box or a covered bucket that the sea brought in to shore? Can you remember how you felt as you knocked the head in?"

This was the sort of thing I liked about Comitu. Moments like these were his best.

"They keep me up on the plantations," he grumbled, glancing back at the brigantine, "but I'd like to be in Catten's shoes, sailing her out through the portal to the rough water. I'd know where to take her. . . . Oh, yes, I'd know how to set her pretty little head——"

There was a delectable pause, and he asked, looking down in his jerky way:

"Didn't you see any diving apparatus on the *Jezebel*, did you? . . . Oh, I 'member, you didn't get below to the main deck."

I smiled.

"No diving-suits, Mr. Comitu—no casks of jugs or chests corded with wire-rope and full of golden doubloons and pistoles and pieces of eight."

I saw a hard gleam to his eyes, and he raised them in a troubled way, as if following a bird in the air. The suspicion came to me that I had really touched a weak place in his mind—that here was one of the adventurers, world-old, who chase the dream of hidden treasure up and down the seas. It came to me again how he had spoken of the treasure-ships of Spain and her early and fastidious looting of Mother Mexico, the losses and deadly wastes of it all. We were on the roman road.

"Has Magdalena Bay any treasure history?" I enquired.

"No," he said in a sharp tone, red showing under the dark of his face.

"She is a bit far from the Spanish Main," I observed leisurely, "but she has all the enchantments, all the romance, so to speak. One need only shut his eyes to see the old Spanish galleons running in here for shelter—possibly being followed by men-of-war."

I watched him furtively. There was a tendency of his mind to listen and follow the pictures like a child to a graphic story of the sea, and at the same time the expression of a cor-

nered creature—a man with hell heavy in his heart, and not a little disturbed about it.

"Let me have one of those cigarettes of yours," he said.

Once on the compound, as we neared the gate to the castle, he touched my arm and tried to look searchingly at me, though his eyes were clouded. . . . Breakfast was an affair. I remember a jug of cream so thick that the contents would not have spilled if rescued very quickly after overturning. I remember pushing aside birds, truffles, waffles and eggs to get to a deep dish that was brought midway in the repast. It had to do with the cream jug. This tale would flow freely if all were as easy to write as these few lines about that dish of fruit. In the centre was a perfect persimmon, transparently ripe. The dish was edged with garnets of pomegranate. Banana disks of blended rose and gold were laid in layers over an ancient and holy offering of ripe, peeled figs. Magda suggested honey with the cream. There was also a little coffee-urn. . . . But I saw nothing of Chireen Holt, nor heard a sound from the music-room.

6

A TALK WITH CHIREEN AND A FEW PAGES TO SET FORTH MINOR MATTERS OF PREPARATION

THE first people to show you cordiality when you come to a settlement are not those, as a rule, who become your real affiliations. Comitu made much of me, and I was not slow to see that this fact complicated my standing with Major Holt; at the same time I was a bit stubborn on the point. I felt capable of playing all ends, and not being tied in any partisanship. In the next few days the characters and inter-relations of the Yellow Lord's establishment cleared somewhat to my mind.

Magda and Chireen Holt had no association whatever. I think Lance must have mentioned to his sister that he saw Magda with me down at the top of the ledge trail in the dawn-dusk,

for Chireen made it very easy for me to be thrown in the company of the other for a day or two after that. I said nothing, and let her use her eyes and judgment to learn how utterly calm I was in regard to Jerry Comitu's girl. Chireen's father moved very quietly about his ways. His health was failing, and it had become his chief affair of the day to conceal the fact; punctilious in dress, personal habits and in the small scopes of order, but forgetting apparently that he was fatally submerged in petty things.

There was a big banyan tree in the compound to the west and south of the castle, and a seat in its spacious shade. I found Chireen there one afternoon, her heart so troubled that words came:

". . . Some terrible curse will befall us all here for the life we lead—eating, drinking, sleeping the days away. There is not enough work, not enough to think about, nothing lifting or constructive. My father is sinking under the softness of it all—a man who used to have decision every hour of the day, and a big brave laugh at the world. And to think of

Lance being brought up in this! It is like a Lotus Island."

"I haven't been here long, but I get your picture," I began.

"I find myself listening when we all get together at table," she added. "I mean the words drum on and on, but suddenly I find myself *listening* to the talk, hearing it with a stranger's ears . . . and then comes the big emptiness of all our lives. . . . Nor do I believe we are honest with the Islanders, nor with the Chinese. I know we are not honest with ourselves!"

"Is it worse since I came?" I asked.

"No, but I have noticed it more . . . and I have wondered why you came—what called you to this sleepy island service."

I sat down on the bench beside her.

"Oh, I don't mean to ask questions," she said quickly.

"I don't mean to talk much, either," I said. "Only this, I was probably looking for a soft thing—'desirous of dignity and good pay.' It didn't occur to me until just now that I had any particular relation to austerities. The fact is, I always thought all the softening influences were injurious to the other fellow."

"I don't mean to preach," she said slowly.

"That's why you left your mark in me," I explained.

"Of course, one having a younger brother——"

"Just that, but if you don't mind I'll mull over what you said a bit on my own hook. . . . Isn't it still out there?"

We sat in silence for a while, and then her father called from the South Gate.

The Yellow Lord's establishment and affairs appear complicated at first from a writing standpoint; a need of many words. I have put down a set of desultory sketches so far, rather than a straight picture, with the idea to furnish points of inception for action and character to be lined in later. Magdalena, the incomparable, as narrated, was inhabited by Malays, but practically controlled by Tsui Tsing and his Chinese. You will know what kind of climate and what kind of soil it was, when I tell you that the quality of tea grown on Magdalena brought the highest prices in the world and went to all the kings from Moscow to Khyber Pass, either way. Peking sent an agent to Magda-

lena once a year to bid for portions of the Yellow Lord's crop.

Recall that there were five or six hundred island Malays within two days' tramp, and two hundred Chinese under the Yellow Lord within ten miles. We were altogether cut off from the world right now, between calls of the *Virgin*, unless Tsui Tsing chose to sail forth from the island in his brigantine. The Yellow Lord's house staff numbered at least twelve Chinese, Hoy Mon at the head of all departments; his second in command a queer Chino, called The Crane. The bunk-house for the Chinese field hands was within the wall, but at the far end of the grounds, in a corner of jungle. It was fully a third of a mile from the main quarters, but said to be connected by an underground passage.

The castle was built of cement blocks made on the island. The wall was of similar construction, ten feet high and topped with broken glass. This protected garden contained twenty-five acres. The house was equipped with every conceivable luxury and more firearms and ammunition than the wisest Islander imagined. The harbour was too tight-mouthed for a first-

class battleship. The island itself exposed little less than a rock-facing to the sea, affording not the slightest idea of the wonderful fertility within. Many small craft of Tsui Tsing's lay near the *Jezebel;* the nearest island, Pandinao, was ninety miles away, the closest port of the regular travel lines, Singapore, five times as far. So much for the close-up after the random sketches; the rest must be caught on the way.

I rode plantations a little with Comitu, but wearied of his repeatedly confessed hatred of the work. The sea called him truly, and the smells of the water-front. I was curious to know how he got started in the treasure-search, and at the end of one long afternoon, as we were riding in from the tea-lands, he told me of his beginnings in New York a quarter of a century ago.

"No, I didn't come down here for my health, though I used to dream of the smoky harbours —used to sit in our office in Duane Street and dream of getting some time down where the mountains meet the sea. . . . That was one more office. Yes, I used to sit in a regular office. We didn't pay for plush furniture, or red-

wood, or mahogany or brass. We used to tell our clients that we were able to do better by them—to work for less margin, because we held our old suite on Duane Street, when everybody else was moving uptown. We apologised for our rough furniture, and told them to go to the younger brokers if they didn't like our ways. We preferred to give our clients the benefit of our modest habits. We told them we did our spending uptown—that we sunk into a cushion or two at home, venturing a bit of furniture now and then in the bosom of our families."

This was the other side to our Jerry. His face was actually vindictive in its appreciation of his own cleverness. He told the shyster tricks with all the gusto that a man would tell a superb action by a friend. Just now he turned on his pony and I saw the back of his head. It was all fleshed in like a bull's crest, and the ears stood out red and thick-lobed like whining questions that were answered with eternal nothings. A man like that never knows what he does when he turns his head; also his sort always judges the intelligence of others by his own. He thought he was getting me right then, though he was never farther.

". . . We could sell 'em beads, or horses, or real estate, or patent medicine," he added. "They fell for us there in those little back-rooms on Duane Street. . . . They were peeved when we didn't let 'em in on the ground floor; they felt honoured when we kept 'em waiting."

"Why did you leave?" I asked.

A curious look of bewilderment crossed his face, as he passed his sun-blackened hand over his brow.

"Health," he said, as if delivering a cryptic password. "And, oh, yes, I always wanted the silence and the sunlight."

"Down by the harbours," I muttered rhythmically.

I seemed to feel a power over him if I cared, to make him talk by leading him into the trodden fields of his heart's desire.

"This Magdalena is a treasure island," I declared.

"The hell it is," he answered quickly.

We were silent, and he asked after a moment:

"Oh, I say, Bowditch, why did you say that?"

"Why, it's as perfect an eden as any island anywhere—isolated, sumptuous, abundance of natural facilities, fish, fruits, nuts and game——"

"You sound like a real estate man," he muttered.

"Just a suggestion of Magdalena's treasures," I rambled.

Jerry growled that he had grown out of all climates so far, and that Magdalena was like the rest, but he *did* know of an island. He was silent for another period, and then asked if he had told me about the old man who died on him back there in New York. He knew he hadn't.

"He came to Duane Street—an old sailor man. Many times he came. Wanted us to stake him," he went on less jerkily. "He knew he could find the place. He had the papers. Why, Bowditch, it was such a story as you'd read. We laughed at it. We lived with our brains back home in New York, and yet we laughed at that old man. . . . I mind him sitting across, his chair cocked up against the wall, telling his story over and over again—so patient about it. I think he told it a thousand times.

We listened and looked at each other. If things were doing, we'd drive him out, but he'd always come back, his old white head brushed with a wet brush, and begin the story of the treasure he'd take us to. Then finally he rolled off the chair telling it, and that was the day *they* were pressing me pretty close. I took from him the little papers that he carried in a black case; then I called to *them* that old Archibald had a fit—called the door-man to come and take him out. It was a fit——"

To me there was something hellish in the story. . . . The old man, reeling from his chair in the midst of the story he told a thousand times, doubtless dreaming of his Magdalena Bay, doubtless seeing it with a beauty that Comitu never saw—the old white head smoothed with a wet brush—I caught it all with a gulp. And he was only one of the many gullibles that came to that office on Duane Street. . . .

"And you've carried those little papers all these years?" I asked idly.

"You see, he sort of wished 'em on me, Bowditch."

"That's queer," I muttered. "The minute I

looked into Magdalena, there was something like this opened up to me—not sunken treasure particularly, but treasure——"

"It's got nothing to do with Magdalena," he answered, his face darkening, "nor Pandinao either——"

He seemed to fight with himself to stop talking right there, and for once he won. As we crossed the compound to the castle he said there might be a little game of draw poker on for the evening if I would play. It was Catten's favourite pastime of an evening, he added. . . . I thought of Chireen and asked to be counted out.

7

CATTEN UNFOLDS SOMEWHAT THROUGH THE ISLAND DAYS AND I ARRANGE FOR A JOURNEY WITH JERRY COMITU

THE *Virgin* came in, and I saw at once that life was different with Catten in the establishment—more banter, more mystery, more drinking. I found myself farther, instead of nearer, to Chireen Holt, because of association with the young Englishmen, who favoured me as Jerry Comitu had done. Catten was more a voice of authority in the establishment, and accordingly could use more time to any advantage he pleased. I'm not going to stop to try for much of a portrayal of Catten now. He unfolds best in the action presently; in fact, I am about through with the descriptive end of this island affair. I don't know if you get it all from what I've tried to do; if not, it must straighten out as we go,

the way it did for me. I might have been a much better servant to Hoy Mon had he let me into some of the inner workings from the start. As a matter of fact, I had to pick them up and play the game at the same time, and I find that the story works out of itself, much after the same fashion.

In the main, life was a sort of polished idleness. I had not seen the Yellow Lord again, though he was said to be present. I had many times met Hoy Mon and felt a queer haunt from his face with its shiny scar on the chin. A thousand interesting suppositions had come to mind about him, but really I knew nothing at all. I dined often with the Holts, even with the Comitus, but affiliated more and more with Catten, even to the point, as I fancied, of angering Jerry Comitu, who had been Catten's crony before my coming. It appears they had played a lot of cards together.

Many things had a queer look about the place: for instance I always breezed stale opium fumes in the vicinity of the bunk-house of the Chinese at the far end of the grounds, but I was not encouraged to go on a sightseeing trip there, during the hours of darkness when the

scores of field-hands were home. I had no further proof that the castle was connected with this outlying building by tunnel; nor of any of the gossip relating to the Yellow Lord. His suite was the place of a thousand treasures. Hoy Mon's private quarters was an anteroom east of the "imperial chamber," as Catten called Tsui Tsing's portion of the castle; and even this was barred from my view. The Secretary always received me in a little outer office from which the mere externals of the house and grounds were conducted.

"But why did Tsui Tsing want a white man of military training?" I had asked Catten a day or two after his return.

"It's his little vanity," Catten answered. "He thinks a man can't be a gentleman who hasn't had a touch of the clinking spur stuff."

The Yellow Lord was said to love himself—to love the feel of himself, as Catten had said, in comment on the unctuous way Tsui Tsing rubbed his hands together and stroked his cheek and chin. It was hinted that he kept himself in a kind of health with masseurs and bath arrangements, at the same time smoking and drinking and feeding out of all proportion for

three ordinary men. Catten allowed me to retain the suspicion that the thing Tsui Tsing liked best about his Magdalena plantation was the fact that he had white gentry working for him.

"It's his little vanity," he repeated.

There were his special agents, Shen Yan and Tin Mong, often back and forth to the main land, who had inherited more tea-knowledge than I could ever hope to accumulate, who had the whole Asiatic banking systems at their finger-ends, and surely could cope with my highest hours in general culture and urbanity, yet Catten and I, mere ornaments, were higher on the pay-roll.

All of Catten's relationships were puzzling; he seemed to be the centre of torment and unrest. Whatever Magda had to do with him had not happiness in it, and Hoy Mon, green-eyed and so delicately green-edged, seemed unable to contain my friend's points of view on the matters of necessity. There was an exquisite courtesy between them (as far as possible from Catten's manner to Captain Hemiter of the *Virgin*), but I fancied a strain about it even

so—men who could contain themselves, even if they didn't pretend to understand.

"There are none better than old Hoy Mon," Catten would say, and add softly: "Best Chino I ever knew, or you Bowditch. Hoy Mon's a mystic—do you know what that is? . . . He isn't a fighting gent—wouldn't give his mind to that. Use up our young western souls for that. . . . Oh, you'll never come to the end of Hoy Mon——"

Catten never expressed surprise. He had a tantalising way of showing just enough quality to keep a comrade from being bored, occasionally springing an unexpected flash of speed or humour or courage, but never giving much of himself. Catten was strangely tormented, actually hating himself, as much as he could hate anything, for not taking a hand in some wing of British service, yet there was a secret something that kept him from leaving Magdalena—as perfect a hiding-place as a man could find, most admirable island from every point of view for a young man to forget a big mistake. . . . As I explained, Catten and I lived in separate bungalows outside of the court. I recall one particular afternoon after

about two months on the island, we awoke from siesta at the same time; I moved sedately to my front porch and my friend to his. I smiled, partly because he looked so utterly sleepy and bored.

"I tell you, Bowditch,—I tell you, we're a lot of he-honey-bees, and we're about to be exterminated. Drones always catch it sooner or later."

Catten referred to the slaughter of males which takes place once or twice a year in well-ordered hives. His idea was that we were taking it altogether too easy in Tsui Tsing's little island tea-plantations while the whole outer world was in conflagration. He had thus complained to me in his English fashion, taking off his Rajput helmet and mopping his pale narrow brow with a silk handkerchief of canary yellow, adding that Tsui Tsing was a slave driver; that no white man, but a renegade or a badly-used younger son, had any business to work for a Chinaman anyway, and that we were rapidly becoming less than normal for need of a drink.

"Jerry Comitu has been asking me for a

long time to take a little trip around the island," I said. "Think I'd better go?"

We were standing together at Catten's little packed buffet, for he had beckoned me to his house. He did not answer now. His servant was letting down the swinging *calaban*, the great blanket-covered tub in which bottles cooled amazingly without ice, evaporation from the soaked wool-covering sending cold waves to the glassware within. Two black bottles with the labels sliding were brought forth. Catten glanced at me quizzically as he tapped the arm of his servant to make haste with the corks. That servant was admirable. With steady hand he poured the two tall glasses and withdrew, silently and without haste. That was a good drink, and, as the Irish would say, well-shared. Then we walked to the door together and looked out.

"Yes, I'd go with Jerry, if I were you," he said.

"Do you think Hoy Mon——?" I began.

"Yes, I think he would like it. In fact, he has always been in favour of our establishing better relations with the Islanders——"

I didn't realise that Catten was serious. I

didn't understand the moment at all for some time afterward; yet I remembered it like the high tension of a great play. Thus Catten got to me, leisurely, commonplace, with no particular friction to show his quality—and yet you nor I will never get him all.

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8

WE DINE WITH LABULAMO AND JERRY TALKS OF MY PART IN THE QUEST FOR SUNKEN TREASURE.

JUST as I was leaving to join Comitu for the little expedition around the island, Lance Holt tapped at my door, big Shiela hackling at his heels. . . . The lad was a favourite of mine—a light about him, a lift and spring and bit of silence to go with a smile. I had a suspicion he could die cheerfully for anybody he cared for. The fact is, I should have been glad to spend more time with him, but Lance had the graciousness to require to be cultivated; that is, he never thrust himself into an uncertain place.

"I've got a present for you, Mr. Bowditch," he said, handing me a little gun, a *Wares-Metric*, one of the finest and fanciest of the moderns. I knew he had given it to me because

he liked it well himself; so I told him how grateful I was to carry it, though I had always felt it a boyish matter to pack a gun. In fact, I recalled telling Lance's sister that I was unable to take myself seriously with a gun in my clothes.

Comitu was in a giddy mood. I was so sure that I understood him perfectly by this time that I relaxed on further study. He was like a boy out for a day's sport for one period, talking and chirping to his pony, leaning down to slap a fly from between her shoulders; talking seriously of island politics, no strain about it, until he would turn to me with a bit of secrecy and evasion of some kind which I made no attempt to understand. It grew upon me that he wanted something, but I was idle-minded that day and perfectly content to wait until the thing was disclosed.

We rode down to the shore and walked the mounts along the sand to the group of Chinese sentries that prevented the islanders from passing below on the strand. This sentry-post was directly under the end of the east wall on the cliff above, and a similar post was kept on the

other side of the shore at the *Jezebel's* landing. Comitu was explaining the obvious:

". . . The Tsui Tsing Company hasn't any right to block off a big piece of the harbour this way," he concluded.

"But from a defensive standpoint it's a perfect measure," I remarked. "The fact is, the little *Jezebel* wouldn't be safe at her dock, if it weren't for the wicket over on that side, and this sentry-post here—that is, in case of trouble from the islanders."

"Where did you go to school in this war stuff?" he asked.

He heard my brief answer, and allowed that war people were born, not made, and that schools only slowed-up the real calibre of a natural fighter. He admitted that he was a military genius if he ever had the practice. I didn't dim his picture, and he became more pleased. . . . The third member of our party was a slim silent Chinese, utterly devoted to Comitu, and for the most part a foreman of one of the Chinese field parties. This lad's name, for white man's use, was Jim Hassey. He awed me a bit—I couldn't tell why. I felt tight

around the throat when he smiled at me, which was often.

The Palisades became less abrupt, and presently we reached the single gentle opening from the shore to the interior—hills sloping down to the water level instead of bluffs. Here the strand was very wide and the native fisheries were located. Many big bancos for harbour and outside work were lying up. Here also we struck the hard-packed trail that led back to the native village. We were feasting with Labulamo at high noon.

This old chief was fat and monosyllabic. He expressed great joy in my Kermashaws, smoking them from time to time between meats and fishes and goblets of cooling drink. He was all suffused with himself, and upon dining in quantity sufficient for all of us, he abandoned himself to confession in a few grunts that he realised his own commanding personality, and lapsed into sleep at the board. I went out and played with the naked babies in the checkered sunlight, but Comitu lingered and spent the later afternoon alone with Labulamo. . . . That was the afternoon I looked at things from a native angle. I saw this

among other things: that the tendency of black people is to give the white the benefit of every doubt; that first of all they would give their trust and faith and chattels to the limit; that this is the natural attitude and a part of the quest in every human heart for the Higher Hand; that it is only when their goodness and faith have been hideously and repeatedly abused that they turn to war and hatred.

Having laboriously arrived at this conclusion from an afternoon's sleepy study in the sun-flecked hills and jungles back of the harbour, and sight-seeing with a troop of lean brown boys in loin-cloths through the little turfy paths and damp shaded alleys of their little nipa-thatched town—I wished I had Chireen Holt to tell it to. There isn't much vitality to thinking out a heavy bit of philogenics like that—and no girl to rest and sympathise with you. . . . I mentioned part of my observations to Comitu as we turned in that night—in Labulamo's guest-chamber. Jerry yawned and enquired:

"Say, Bowditch, what do you take to feel like that?"

He was quiet for some minutes; then volun-

teered to smoke one of my brand since Labulamo had spoken well of them. Presently he enquired long and carefully where and how the tobacco blends were procured, discussing the flavour with a connoisseur's zest, which he was not. I saw he was sparring for time and had something real to divulge. He was silent for a bit, then another fold of meaning from my wise remarks about the natives seemed to clear for his mind—seeped in, so to speak, and he took an advantage of it.

"They treat 'em like hell, around the world."

"Meaning the natives, I suppose?"

"They're not getting a square deal here," he remarked.

Which was merely what I had first intimated, but Comitu was looking at it from his own angle now, and it pleased him better. . . . He had determined not to be abrupt. For a while he brimmed with zeal to let me in on the details of his life up to the present moment, hinting how he had once had his own craft under his feet up in the Philippines before the Americans took over the islands—"commanding as nifty a little school of Malays as ever a white man banded together"—commanding other

things which he confessed himself disinclined to mention just now. . . . I drew him on. There is something wicked about listening to a man who insists on unpacking a fool streak, yet something inside me answered like sparks under the soft, fanning wind. He touched me familiarly, saying:

"Give me another one of those little Kermashaws, Bowditch. Right sharp choice of tobacco, that——"

I gave him a light, too. I watched him fill his torso with the first full fragrance and blow it out with a complacence that was also bull-like—his eyes softening into nonenity under the breeze of the narcotic. He answered the whip like a school-boy. So many of his moods were shoals that I was prone to undervalue the whole. I met a sudden, genial gust of friendship, hard to take.

"You want to know what it's all about, don't you? You're a good head, Bowditch. I saw that the first minute or two. It don't take me all day to know a white man. 'Way back at the little worn desk in Duane Street, old men, partners of mine, would say: 'Jerry, what do you think of this man?' or 'Jerry, how do you

size up that chap yonder?' . . . I know when a man wants to come in and go out. Tell me, now, Bowditch, don't this sort of thing pull you pretty hard? Aren't you a bit sick now to know what it's all about? I'm just the fellow to tell you——"

There were two candles still burning, and natives at the fans. I turned to Comitu invitingly, but did not venture to speak.

"Yes, I'll tell you," he repeated. "They think I'm a little slow up here. They put me back on the plantations when I belong to the water."

He placed his hand on his head with a look of indescribable sophistication.

"I am badly off, I am. I need to be kept back in the tea-lands. Poor old Jerry Comitu," he drawled, his face reddening with joy at the play of his own wits.

"Harbour, hacienda, steam yacht—little island all your own," he went on cryptically, "little brown natives to love you and dig treasure for you . . . not a lot of Chino black smokes."

He waited for me to speak, which I didn't.

"I'm not talking of Magdalena," he said after a moment.

"I didn't presume you were," said I. "Tell me, Jerry, why they do such a lot of opium smoking here. These natives are clean of it, but our Chinese seem saturated."

He laughed. "Pretty soft and confiding you are, Bowditch; pretty bland you are! Don't you know anything about that?"

"I supposed you would set me straight——"

"It's cheaper than wages, and they never leave. . . ."

"Are the Tsui Tsing people playing that game?" I questioned.

This set him back again. I saw that it was best to let him talk without my questions, though I really wanted to know now. . . . Comitu let me in very briefly that it was the foreigners of the firm who were paying in opium, not the old Tsui Tsing people. I didn't understand clearly, but he scouted the idea of my being sincere when I prodded for more knowledge. . . . It was mostly banter and South Sea talk among us whites down in Magdalena, sincerity avoided like a malignant sin. . . . Comitu asked me if I had been aboard the *Jezebel* lately. I told him that Catten and I occasionally dined down there, and that once

we had groglessly entertained Captain Hemiter at the harbour's edge instead of up in the castle.

"Why don't you give the *Jezebel* more of your time, Jerry?" I asked.

"Catten and I always get into an argument down there," he said innocently. "We tried it, but he says he can play a better game of poker up on high land. . . . Did you see the diving suits yet?"

"No. Catten hasn't shown me them——"

"Did he say there *was* any?"

Jerry was sitting up straight. He snapped the last question in a fashion that made me dry inside. He was peering all too familiarly into my eyes, when he finally caught himself and coughed.

"Something bit me," he added dismally.

"No, Catten didn't exactly grant that he had got in his consignment of submarine stuff," I said with a yawn.

I have often noticed that a man enraptured with his own acumen is slow to grant anybody else having any. Comitu never thought of my showing any guile at this point. Playing with him just then got me into serious trouble as I look at it from a distance like this of the writ-

ing end. Jerry would never have let me into something of his secret that night if he hadn't been driven full of torment and unrest by my words about Catten. As a matter of fact, I had been pretty well over the *Jezebel*, and hadn't seen any submarine equipment, and Catten hadn't mentioned anything of the kind. My trip to Labulamo might have been merely a test or experiment had I not led him on at this point.

He didn't tell me the name of the island, but he came in a lot closer about the paper old Archibald left when he died in Duane Street; he said he had the island located, and the place where the treasure had been dumped in the harbour; that he had looked down in the still waters and seen the salt-crusted and iron-hooped chests of gold—"enough gold to send Columbus out of Palos with a new fleet every day, for a couple of years."

You'll be curious to know the exact nature of my thought at this time. We have all dreamed of being personally in on such a narrative. There is nothing so disenchanting as attainment. We hear that said a whole lot before we finally realise that the man who wrote

it first meant what he said. The main joy is anticipation, and the chief pain for all concerned is because our ideals don't work out as we picture they should. Some time we will learn to be wise enough to take it all as a passing show—to watch all life go by. Suddenly I asked myself the question: "Yes, but why is he showing me?"

If I knew the trade mind, and this was part of Comitu's brain-pan, he wasn't divulging these things by way of mere entertainment. Evidently he wanted to take on a partner. This was it, I concluded. He would undertake to buy me presently.

It was the simplest thing in the world, he was saying. . . . The island was the last and loneliest out of travel lines, but perfect as Magdalena in most respects, in some superior. The harbour was smaller, but just as safe and not so high as our shaggy-lined port. He stated Magda had been there and had looked overside with him from a native canoe which they were poling themselves, according to directions; that the people were simple and friendly; that he, Jerry Comitu, could always get along with natives; that they wanted a white king badly, and

he was to spare for a while; that he had been practising the king stuff here in Magdalena and elsewhere, and knew what he was talking about.

"Say, Bowditch," he went on, "if you think these poor boobs of Magdalena are simple and childish and affectionate, you ought to see our own people over in——"

He laughed and added:

"I've got an idea I'll be letting you in on the name and charts presently."

I nodded.

"Why, man, the Islanders here are skittish compared to our little brown brothers over yonder. Yes, sir, our morals are nervous here——"

"What's to hinder you from going and getting a line around those chests?" I asked.

"Now that's what I wanted to hear; that's the guts of the whole thing, exact."

I nodded again for emphasis.

"We need money for equipment, Bowditch," he said quietly. "Quite a little money, old son, and more than that we need a ship—a brigantine, preferably an auxiliary. In fact, we need the *Jezebel*."

9

IN WHICH I REALISE THE WORST, AND TWICE IN AN HOUR MISS VIOLENT DEATH

I TOLD him to wait for morning.

Comitu went on talking softly. He said there was a partition among the Tsui Tsing people; that Hoy Mon stood for one thing and Catten another; that the Islanders were getting the worst of it on every deal from the big Trading Company; that the Islanders knew it and didn't presume to stand it much longer; that the Chinese were getting the worst of it; that the whole game from the continent was rotten fabric. . . . Personally Jerry didn't propose to continue to swelter back in the tea-lands.

Again I told him to wait until morning, but he couldn't stop now. Presently I was let in on his idea to join with the Islanders and help them take their island back from the Tsui

Tsing Trading Company, including the *Jezebel*. Jerry explained that the whole affair would be a matter of sport, and that sport was everything in a life like ours. He reminded me of some little brass cannon in the plaza of the town, which I had observed during the afternoon. He said it was salvage from a ship that broke up off the island long ago—that the Tsui Tsing Trading Company had permitted the natives to retain them for their plaza, but that the Tsui Tsing people were not aware how much the natives cherished the ordnance, having succeeded after many trials and failures in making ammunition for same.

I saw something of Comitu's relation to Catten now. Plainly he could not have gone so far with Catten as with me, possibly only suggesting an excursion on the *Jezebel* to this other island, and not a war against the Trading Company by the Islanders. Certainly he could not have shown his full hand to Catten and continued to hold his place in the establishment. It was clear that Catten had not been greatly allured, but that Comitu was tormented by the fear that the Englishman might double-cross him and go out in search of the treasure for

himself. Possibly something of this sort was responsible for his panic about the mythical diving paraphernalia. I recalled Comitu staying off the *Jezebel* which he loved so well.

I wasn't even tempted, but the complication did not end there. Big Jerry had worked himself up into the thought that I was to be with him. In fact, he had me over here in the enemy's camp, so to speak. I was at large and welcome in case I joined with him; at his mercy if I didn't. . . . I forgot the coolness from the fans of the natives for a few minutes. The fact is, I perspired a bit and suggested that it would look cooler, at least, if the remaining candles were put out.

Jerry laughed. I laughed. I couldn't ask him to wait until morning for my answer, having suggested this twice. I hinted that it was a big thing that needed a lot of thinking, but Jerry allowed that there was no chance to wobble—that the natives were about to exterminate the foreign element, and that I had better get in before the openings were sewed up.

"The fact is, I like you, Bowditch," he added.

I was a bit savage or I might have tided the night over. I had seen too much of Jerry to

hold him high. The fact is, I should have feared him all the more for his vanities and smaller moments, and because of his tendency toward treachery from many of his tales. It's always the weak man who is dangerous, the cowardly man who is most truly cruel. . . .

I smile a little at the audacity of it, but I told him there in Labulamo's shack that I had come to Magdalena to work for the Trading Company and that I hadn't yet severed my connections, which was a formality requiring the presence of Catten and Hoy Mon.

"You mean you want to go back there first——"

"Exactly."

"Doubtless have a little talk with Major Holt?"

"Yes."

"And family?"

"Yes, Jerry."

"And the treasure doesn't interest you?"

"Of course."

"Well," he finished with a yawn, "as they used to say back in Duane Street, there's a full day tomorrow that hasn't been touched yet."

I thought seriously of trying to make a get-away that night, but the fanners looked sleepless. It was clearer and clearer, as Jerry Comitu peacefully snored, that he had brought me here to negotiate a partnership. Failing to join him, I would not be permitted to return. . . . At no time had Chireen Holt been far from my mind, but I was thinking rather intensely about her just now, and what it would mean not to get back—ever. Just then I reached for my clothes, which were draping a frame near the pallet where I lay. The near fanner blinked and rolled his eyeball at me in the dim candlelight. I drew the blouse to me, sitting up. I didn't want a cigarette, but I had to make the play now. The real thought was to secure the little *Wares Metric* that Lance had given me. The moment was peculiar. I had just been struck with the notion a minute before, that Chireen Holt had something to do with that gift.

I finally drifted off to sleep. A tired man can do that even if he feels the chances against his being encouraged to wake up. I did awake, however, and Comitu was just coming into the quarters, having completed a certain errand

outside. . . . I had no mind for breakfast, and when Jerry suggested that I join him for a little paddle across the harbour, I didn't enthuse, but caught on. . . . Jim Hassey, two islanders, Jerry and I formed this merry party. I could not help feeling that it was somehow in my honour. The craft was a large *banco* with outriggers and a block for a single huge straw sail.

We drifted across the harbour toward the portal. Jerry was preoccupied in spite of his love for the water. I saw that he was strategist enough to force me to open the subject of the night before; his look plainly told me that it was now my move. I noted several casks and mattings of food forward in the *banco*, the sight of which didn't make me think less fast. I could see the honest sweat breaking forth from the squat hero at the pole. The harbour was still and breathless, the thin mist in the sky like a faint white flame, but I report that there were lingering chill zones in the air for me, a dislike for death just now, a cold straight-seeing of ways I might have done better to prepare for death, especially in ways that concerned Chireen.

"I asked you last night," I said idly, "if the treasure-hunt turned out according to the papers of the little old man who came to you long ago."

Jerry leaned to me with a leer, and that curious manner of the small mind delighting to dangle a morsel before the eyes of another.

"It hasn't all turned out. We're not through over there yet, Bowditch. They always used to say back in Duane Street that Jerry Comitu would never leave a job half done," he laughed.

"I was interested in that old caller of yours, —old Archibald," I said.

He nodded, watching me. I had the absurd feeling of helplessness from time to time as if this were some sort of commercial transaction.

"Hair combed back with wet brush," I added.

"I say, are you still interested in seeing Catten and Hoy Mon?"

"It's a matter of form," I smiled.

"Huh——"

He contemplated me with a calculating eye, repeating, "A matter of form." Then his head came nearer, and he observed:

"You had something for me, Bowditch. I liked you. Pity we couldn't pull together on this little trip."

I cleared my throat. The past tense was so obvious and unembarrassed through his sentences. . . . The day was clearer. Though the sunlight on the mist still strained the eyes, the gold of morning was becoming clearer and clearer. We were nearing the portal and I watched Comitu and the white water of the race. The tide was going out, even as on that morning when I first came ashore from the *Lagnon* and lay for a while on the edge of the opposite portal.

I find myself now under the impulse again to acquaint you of the sun and the sky, the white caps out in the offing, the white foam where the rocks cut the race, the great creamy cliffs, straight up, the glaring, sapphire bay, the ruby roof lying in a thin gold smoke across. . . . They were warping the *banco* into the still water directly under the landward end of a ledge on the southern portal, the native side of the island. Jim Hassey leapt out, and took a pike-pole to bring the craft around. He reached down and again the whim in my heart

about him touched my throat—the slim figure and the ready smile, as he reached down to take Jerry's hand. The eyes of the two natives were nailed to me. I was standing in the place just made vacant by Comitu's ascent. He rose from his knees on the rocks above and reached toward Jim Hassey to take the pike-pole just as I caught the ledge and started to swing up to him.

"No, no, you don't, Bowditch!"

That was the richest instant I ever lived in the way of experience. I saw the demon of murder take Comitu, his face outraged with obsession; I felt the great chill of separateness from all life that a man must feel when other men seriously go about his hanging. A man is slow to take his own murder for granted. I even saw at the same instant that Comitu had preferred not to murder me. The provisioned *banco* meant to take me to some place of exile —and this was Jerry's *adios*. If I sat back and permitted myself to be sailed out of the portal, my life might not be attempted, but I could not. How utterly strange my words in that moment of utter inhumanity!

"But I want to come, too——"

". . . Off—you—you make me kill you! . . . Then get me afterward——"

The pike was raised, and I snuggled to the cliff and to the left as it went by, the shod-end taking a piece of flesh out of my right shoulder. Jerry had wanted my throat and missed by six inches. He was picking up for a second thrust when over I went backward into the race. I felt a rake from the pike handle and the whip of the current, but swam seaward with it, keeping below the surface until the black of suffocation arose from lungs and brain. I heard strains of music as if Chireen were at the piano across the compound. My idea in staying under was to be out of the immediate range of a bullet when I first came up. Jerry had been a bit too modest to use his sixshooter first—had to fan up his rage with a pike-pole. . . . Sixty feet out at sea I dared daylight again, and, sure enough, Comitu emptied his six-shooter at me from the ledge, and yelled for the *banco* to make more speed. I sounded again, untouched, and turned to the right, starting across the mouth of the harbour to reach the northern portal, a stiff swim for the fittest kind of man.

. . . I was out of pistol range. The *banco* was in the passage but did not seem to be gaining. My white clothing and light shoes impeded as little as covering could, but they were a burden in the last stretch of the swim. The struggle was not to be drawn out to sea in the steady lapping pressure of the tide. The thing that gave me spirit was a curious singing presence deep within—as if I were hearing Chireen play—a laugh about it, nothing really mattering greatly, as if we would get together at the right good hour, no matter who or what of personal or temporal nature appeared to intervene. And then from time to time, over the crystal tips of the pouring water, I saw Comitu and Jim Hassey still on the ledge, Comitu waving, empty gun in hand, and urging the natives not to fail. In his frenzy at not finishing his job, he had ordered the *banco* after me, not stopping to descend himself. His voice was no longer audible from where I was, so close to the many-voiced water.

. . . I was a part of the tide—took on its greyness, and there were seconds when all life, past and ahead, looked desolate and a mockery. I seemed to live as a phantom might in the Yel-

low Lord's establishment, my body carried out to sea, but the ghost of it there with Chireen . . . then the memory of Comitu's beady burning eyes as he lifted the pike a second time scorched me back into action. I was losing blood. It all made me whimper a bit, but I managed a sort of smile with it—as if I were telling Chireen. The current had a maddening deviltry, so steady and strong. There was something primitive in my dismay—that deep pain of being wounded, cornered, put to death—the end of the job mangled and delayed by a botcher. A quick review of many savage lives, this, and, queerly, the idea of death came to me as a sheltering wing, a dark, soft, deep, black wing. It was so slow to fold me in—that was the agony. . . . All this hacking and drowning was ages long—and *she* was to remain on the other side.

Strangling cross seas were getting me now. I put will against them—the last play of will force against the suffocation in the chest and the bursting expansion of throat and temples. There is some wonder about what a man can do when he opens the inner reservoirs of endurance. I don't understand, but I know that

somehow at last, in the singing of death—blood in the veins pounding like an iron mill and anguish to tear the chest open and let in more wind and daylight—at last, as I say, the killing force of the tide went out of the water, and I was carried inshore in the rough arms of the surf.

10

IN WHICH I WATCH A CRAB-EYED NATIVE COMMIT SILENT MURDER UPON ONE OF OUR CHINESE.

I CRAWLED out of the surf to the narrow sand strip facing the open sea. The native *banco* was lost to my eyes for a moment as I lay panting on the sand. Thickened blood in throat and nostril, and a chest full of heart-break, I couldn't somehow hold the sense of peril from the two little following black men. I might have roused earlier if Comitu had been in the boat. Blackness came over me—a deep swoon like a benison. If you'll believe, it was an aching pain against my hip that made me rouse in time.

I seemed to be lying upon a stone. I couldn't have been "out" more than two minutes, for I was still spent and gasping from the sea. That which roused me was the little pistol in my

coat pocket. It had chafed a bit yesterday, having no holster, and was lying uneasily now, under the bone of my hip. The world was coming back to consciousness. Before me, on the sand, was the *banco* beached. A moment later, turning, I would not have been in time. An Islander on either side was stealing toward me from behind on the deep sand. You may find it hard to understand that I did not get much of a shock from this. Down, all but whipped myself, in a half-delirium, it did not appear half so astonishing as afterward, that Chireen or her brother should have given me a weapon that changed all history for me. I turned with a laugh at the two natives, bracing my shoulders up from the sand with one hand and the gun in the other. I had none of their language, but a pistol, even a little automatic, speaks understandingly to the natives of the farthest isles these days.

They ceased to crawl, but remained naïvely upon their knees, signifying utter defeat so far as their mission was concerned. Of course I didn't fire, merely saw them to the *banco*, and stood up while they skilfully put out through the surf. . . . The ledge of the southern rock

of the portal where Comitu and Jim Hassey had stood was cut off from where we were by the huge northern cliff. There was no way for Jerry to get on this side, except to swim, until the *banco* returned for him, yet I didn't forget it meant the life of his whole game to get me.

I wondered what the little Islanders would tell him, as I sank back in the hot sand to breathe a bit longer. My right shoulder, where the pike had grazed, looked as if a shark had twisted off a small piece. Just a flesh wound, but filled with salt and sand, and pounding out of all proportion. The thing was bleeding badly. I staunched it as well as possible with the wet shirt. I seldom wanted a cigarette as I did just now, but they were soaked and swollen; the little hunting-case supposed to be water-tight had betrayed me.

It was hard to get the laugh working in this adventure of pain. I tried to think it out coherently, sitting upon the sand. I wasn't ready to walk, yet I needed a drink and bandage. The landing of the *Jezebel* was four or five miles by the shore—the same stretch that I had done the first morning on the island, shoes in hand—but out of the question now, for Comitu

wanted me badly, and could follow my movements along the shore. If the natives told the truth, he would recross after me in the *banco* as soon as they reached him. This thought roused me a trifle. He might soon be back here where I sat, in spite of the tide.

Yet I blew a few minutes more, in the recklessness of exhaustion. Perhaps they would lie, announcing my death. . . . Still Comitu would be restless. This grew upon me now, and how he would feel with me at large, having the full story of his treacherous ideas, and Magda and his woman still in the castle.

. . . Still I fell away into a kind of reverie, wishing I could hear her playing the Tschaikovsky waltz again; wishing she could play me home to her that way—that no man or no matter stood between; that I could go to her in that dim music-room, the bamboo branches waving at the window, see her rise and turn obediently to play for me at my word.

I let out a yelp, scrambling to my feet. Then I had to laugh at it. A man gets so atrociously serious when his nerves are draggled a bit. If we really had ourselves in hand, we could tell a wound when to hit it up or not. . . . I could

not stay here on the sand and bleed to death. Every little while at first I had to tell the story over; had to organise its different points for my mind, which wanted to give up. I have always found it so—if a man can really generate enough will-force, something gives. He is tested and twisted to the last ounce, but if he manages not to give way, conditions ease a bit. . . . Not yet ten in the morning. It was impossible to walk around by the shore because that would bring me in plain sight of Comitu and the *banco*. There was more than a mile to do south, along the shore outside the harbour, before a big ravine breaking down to the water made ascent possible. The sunlight was searching and furious now. I remember talking oddly to myself.

I heard a bird-song high among the cliffs. It brought a bit of warm life to me in that great, bewildering pain. Birds always had something special to say to me, even as a lad. I remember my mother at her sewing—how I would see a smile around her lips, and would listen for a bird-song somewhere out among the trees, if I had not heard it already, because I

knew the smile—delicate, soft, elate—that she had for the birds and nothing else.

There's a mystery about the way the earth pulls in a case like mine. If a man can bring a laugh to the attraction and resist it, the next reservoir of strength opens, and he is a fuller individual for each conquest. The growth of backbone in a man is a race between how much he can stand and how often.

There never was a day like this one for me under the slow moving sun. I shunted from thicket to thicket, resting a little in the shade of the uplands—thin dry thickets now, for the rainy season was long past. The fight was to keep awake, for I felt I should sleep the clock around if I ever let go. At last a roost in the hillside, overlooking the harbour, the *Jezebel* lying sweet and silent below. Always a picture, that little brigantine, and bad to have around as a big diamond. . . . Right now the thing got away from me. I had merely sat down, huddling back into the shade from a narrow open slope, meaning only to linger a moment before letting myself down to the warehouse . . . but I slept until dusk.

The fact is, I was aroused by a sudden racket

in the thicket to the left. I wasn't normal, yet the enactment was leisurely, and left itself impressed in a way that never dies out of the brain. A little lean Chino from the tea-lands, one of our own boys, ran into the open, an Islander at his heels. The native was low, little, bare-footed, with a curved knife in his hand—a throat-cutter, designed for use from behind, the blade a foot long with a pruning crook to it. The poor Chino knew he was gone. He had no legs like the Islander, who ran low and swiftly, eyes distended like a crab's, his hand stretching out as toward a goal.

Then before me, the Islander leaped and stopped short, as one pulling a lariat taut. The Chino's head whipped back, his queue dangling, his cap fallen, the white untanned line of his forehead curved behind to me. His body had lost all look of a man. It beat the ground like a bag with some animal tied in it.

The native's teeth showed with goat-like laughter. He wiped his knife upon the grass, pressed his free hand queerly, hungrily into his waist at the side, then slipped past me alone.

11

THEY TAKE ME BACK AT THE CASTLE AND I HEAR WHAT HAS BEFALLEN MEANWHILE

I DON'T know how long I sat there in a kind of fascination. I heard at last the low notes of the nesting-birds in the thickets behind me. It was darker. I began to get an idea what had happened. There was war begun—since I had left. We had lost no Chinese like this heretofore. Possibly Jerry had gone back to the castle and made his final clearing from there while I slept. It was with mockery that I realised (after the first pain and stiffness of rising) that I was better now, having taken my rest at the price of leaving my friends unwarned.

All seemed as usual down in the harbour. I did not descend now, but lost no time over the hills to the compound. The breeze from the tea-lands was sweet in the early darkness. I

passed the big banyan tree, and not a light showed from the castle ahead. The sound of the piano would be like a deep drink of the soul to me, but certainly I deserved the worst. The little episode back at the edge of the clearing had left me open to any atrocity, and the dark windows ahead let my imagination loose with singular power. But surely the natives would be in revel there if they had taken over the establishment and murdered the people! . . . I listened in the bamboo-foliage at the barred window of the piano-room, then moved to a window of Major Holt's quarters. A growl from within was one of the best things I ever heard.

"Be still, Shiela," in Lance's voice.

I, standing outside, heard nothing just after that, but was conscious of the presence that came to the curtains near me, more than a perfume, and then the "*Is it you?*" like a voice from within one's own heart.

"Yes."

"Thank God."

Then I heard her whisper to Lance that I had come, and the voices continued. From the

court beyond came the laughing command of Catten:

"Tell him to go around to the sentry-door in the North Gate."

A minute after that I was in the midst of them. That hour gave me the nearest thing to the feeling of home that I had known in twenty years. In fact, I had to laugh at myself. As soon as I had bathed, Chireen took me to an inner-room and bound my shoulder; meanwhile supper was served in the court. "Yes, I knew you were alive," she said, and again, as I talked: "Yes, I knew you were suffering. . . ."

I have told you that the Castle was a broad, white, one-floored structure of many rooms, built around a brick-paved court with a pool in the centre. It was there, under the palms in the starlight, that I seemed to see Chireen Holt for the first time. I studied her now under the dim arches back from the pool—rather white in the shadow, her face. I could see it when my eyes were shut, as if the replica of herself were within, and the two were deeply aware of each other. She managed to bring tea for me, in spite of the plethora of service—a Chinese for every boot-tree, as Catten had remarked. Also

she brought little things of her own making. Now and then there was an expression in her eyes almost new to my world in the dim starlight under the arches. It was she who told me of Jerry Comitu's coming to the castle earlier in the day.

"It was about noon," she said. "He was booted and showy and full of leisure. He said he had crossed the harbour for some things of yours and his own—that old Labulamo had taken a fancy to your cigarettes and you had sent him for a larger supply among other things; also that you were 'down' a bit today, from some heavy travel in the sun yesterday, and that you wished to remain a day longer if Hoy Mon and Mr. Catten did not mind. . . ."

Jerry had lost no time after the return of the *banco*. I wondered if the little natives had reported my death to him.

"He talked some time to Magda," Chireen continued, "and then for quite a while in his own room with Magda's mother. There were tears—some hysteria from her, as they talked. He had asked me to look for your carton of cigarettes for Labulamo, and, having found them, I took several foils to him in there.

Magda did not join her father and mother. . . . A little later there was a sound as if Jerry Comitu had struck Magda's mother. I am not sure, of course, but it startled me. He remarked, apropos of nothing, to me, as he passed out, that Chinese always do better under a white man. Of course, we didn't understand his part then."

I was seeing Chireen Holt now, as she talked, with a sweetness and familiarity that I had not dreamed of. Catten was waiting for me to join him, so she finished hurriedly, her voice lowered:

"Hoy Mon gave Mr. Catten the command of the situation when he realised that there was to be fighting. You see, we had found something wrong in Comitu's room after Magda's mother had left."

Chireen seemed anxious to avoid something just here. "Mr. Catten appeared surprised at first, as he accepted the command," she added vaguely.

"But your father?" I said.

"He isn't well, Mr. Bowditch," she answered softly. "In fact, I never saw it so clearly as this afternoon in the stress. He seemed help-

less. Mr. Catten saw it, too. . . . You see, there was firing about four in the afternoon, out on the plantations—the natives attacking the Chinese on the farther fields. Part of the tea-workers were crowding into the gates here, and part at the bunk-house. Still we hadn't settled on the thought of treachery from Jerry Comitu. It all seemed so hard with Father ill and you away."

Magda's mother apparently had followed Comitu an hour or two after his final passing from the castle and compound. Magda had still remained, tearful and inarticulate. Major Holt had taken a few household servants and a dozen field hands to go down and act as additional guards for the *Jezebel* and the two posts below the wall-ends on the shore. Messages had been sent to the farther fields. As the remoter Chinese came in, Catten had sent reinforcements from time to time down to the harbour. By dark the firing had ended, and, according to the reports from Major Holt and The Crane, timekeeper and manager at the bunk-house, only ten or twelve of our two hundred Chinese were missing as a result of the surprise. Comitu hadn't been given time to start

things very formidably on account of my escape from his hands. Meanwhile I took the delight in Chireen's ministrations. Somehow the picture of all that she left upon my mind was that of her own father's weakness. She had given me the impression of his running across the compound in the first firing—heavy steps on the stones, legs that hadn't been used to run with for many months.

Catten had taken quarters in the castle, our little bungalows in the compound being untenable now. Moreover, my English friend essayed to share his quarters with me. It was rather astonishing to find him in command—the man whom I had left the day before belonging with me amidships, so to speak. There was absolutely no change in his manner. He led me as aforetime over to the buffet where the *calaban* and other affairs from our joint cabinets had already been brought. We drank with calmness and cheer. When I undertook to ask questions, Catten laughed at me queerly:

"You got more in a half-hour at supper-time than I know altogether. I'm looking for you to tell me what happened."

He looked younger. There was a queer laugh back of his eyes.

"Besides, I'm listening to hear how you got away from Jerry."

So it was I who talked first. It was not for a half-hour or so that I learned the saving part Chireen had played in the afternoon. Catten explained lightly:

"Old Jerry's woman came forth from quarters with a black welt on her forehead. She was bent for somewhere. I followed her out into the compound. This was before the firing, and we hadn't a line on things, so I wondered why she was so anxious to cross into the pepper trees. As I turned back, Chireen hurried to me and reported that there was a smell of powder in Comitu's rooms. I smelled the smoke but could find nothing amiss, and would have looked elsewhere, had not Chireen taken up the rug. . . . You see, Jerry was badly hurried, Bowditch——"

"The rug?" I said.

"Your getaway rather balled up old Jerry," Catten drawled. "He didn't do anything as he hoped; at least, it looked so. Had to wallop

the Missus at the last and leave her to tend the powder-magazine——"

"The rug?" said I.

"Oh, yes. The floor was broken and a fuse running to the Yellow Lord's largest powder-hole—a lot of work in there in preparation. . . . If it hadn't been for your complication and Chireen's wits, Jerry's parting would have been marked by our blow-up."

"But Magda?" I asked after a pause.

"I don't get her, Bowditch," Catten said, turning away. "I've got a suspicion she's with us and against the old man. She wouldn't leave. She hasn't been living in their quarters of late. I don't believe she's in with old Jerry. . . . Besides, the Mother was half insane at leaving her."

I was thoughtful. Just now it occurred to me that the *Virgin* was due in the harbour in about three days. I asked if this were not unfortunate for Jerry and the Islanders—a bad time to open hostilities, almost immediate interruption to be reckoned with from their standpoint.

"I don't think Jerry will undertake to do much until the *Virgin* is in," was Catten's curi-

ous answer. "Get a bit of sleep, Bowditch. I'm sending you down into the harbour early to relieve the Major. We've got to keep the shore clear between the wall-ends, the ledge-trail opened, and the *Jezebel* closely watched, of course. They would have fired our go-downs first of all—if it hadn't been for your part to-day. . . . Yes, we'll have to take care of the *Jezebel* and the small boats while there is a straight spine left——"

Just then I remembered what Catten had said so recently about the white men of the Yellow Lord being like drones in a hive, and ripening for extermination presently. . . . It was day-break and already hot when I went below to the jetties, where the *Jezebel* lay. The sharky harbour was too little and high-banked to have much of a breeze of its own. It could show a scavenger's fin now and then, but scarcely a ripple of weather. Far across, at the native fishing-port, I saw with a glass that the natives were bringing up their four *Sanguinaries*—ancient lumps of ordnance Jerry had told me about, which Tsui Tsing had left in the possession of the Islanders, bits of salvage from some

British ship that had broken up outside the harbour.

The next hour or two was about the liveliest in reflection that I had passed so far on that lonely little island. In spite of pain I was full of zeal for awakening activities, the secret fondness for Catten, and the altogether new dimension which Chireen Holt had opened for my uncertain vision. Here was work at last—four ancient brass dogs confronting the *Jezebel* on the opposite shore, their snub-noses shining through the shimmer on top of the yellow-green harbour. Meanwhile, we were putting things ship-shape on board the auxiliary . . . a bit of ice left in her cuddy, a frosty bottle or two.

Life took on an altogether new and relishable touch—a war, a woman, a friend. I saw the Yellow Lord and his admirable little tea island moving at last into the mad pulse and fever of the rest of the world. Possibly I sent a bit of a laugh out through the narrow harbour entrance where the big sea-water showed flecks of white. At noon I was relieved and joined Catten in quarters. I gripped his hand and told

him about the four guns emplaced on the opposite harbour bank.

"Old Jerry always was interested in those pieces," Catten observed.

"I can't see how he's going to make good on the traitor-stuff," I remarked cheerfully.

"That's a good literary word—that traitor," Catten answered, "but a bit big for an *opera-bouffe* soldier's change of side."

I was thoughtful. Catten's manner of saying what he didnt think often left me in a half-insane unrest.

"What about Magda?" I asked.

"That little bear-cat's too much for me," Catten reflected. "I don't get her at all. I let Hoy Mon lock her up for the present, much as I hate the idea."

"How does Hoy Mon take old Jerry's change of sides?" I asked.

"Sick about it," Catten answered. "He would have sworn by Comitu. Hoy Mon also says Tsui Tsing never made a mistake in a man before."

12

THE BEGINNING OF A LONG NIGHT—JERRY COMITU SENDS OUT A KIDNAPPING PARTY FOR DAUGHTER MAGDA

THAT night after things were quiet and Major Holt was on duty in the harbour, I dropped down in my new quarters in the castle, realising for the first time what these recent weeks of island stuff under the Yellow Lord had done for me. Of course, I had been slightly hurt, but my weakness was more than that. The recent rush of activities was wearing on my dull and somnolent faculties like a stiff shoe. Not yet thirty years old and here I was tired, short of breath, sagging deep into a cot. I might have blamed the tropics, the inimitable cuisine, the management of the Yellow Lord's establishment, the bins and bottles in the basement, the storage vaults and perfect service, but, as a matter of

fact, I blamed myself. I saw the early future under the awnings of a fat and barefoot sot, doing two hours' work a day with bluster, and fourteen hours of placating various appetites, and nursing a bad temper, which wouldn't have been so bad except for the futility of it. It was clear to me that an angry man is always futile; that an angry man is never right; that a man can't be angry and right. We were overfed and sick with ourselves. Certainly I was not the man physically that I had been on the day of arrival. Too much drink, too much banter, too much front. Altogether I despised myself and the cause of it dawned presently. It wasn't the new war altogether; it wasn't the spur of infinite things to do to save our lives and the tea plantation; it was something in those pure deep pools of silent womanhood which Chireen Holt had let me look into under the dim arches this night.

Catten came in.

". . . Be that as it may," I said presently, "about Tsui Tsing never misjudging a white man before. I've got a suspicion he didn't know Jerry any more than he knew me. A man must include another, must be able to drown the

other in himself, in order to understand him."

Catten made a queer sound in his neck which meant for me to go on, that I was not more than usually uninteresting.

"A lot of these people," I added, "with weight and solemnity and a house full of lares and penates and butter on their chins, get a reputation for being infallible because they keep their mouths shut."

I had even included the sanctified Hoy Mon in my momentary scepticism.

"You may get a chance to see how infallible our Yellow Lord can be at times, Bowditch," Catten said absently. ". . . I don't feel right about this Magda business," he added. "She stayed even after her mother got away. What in God's name did she stay for? She could have got away all the afternoon. I don't like locking her up. I fall for this Magda sort."

My mind glanced back over the past weeks, trying to find reality of any kind in the relation between Catten and Comitu's daughter. There didn't appear to be anything significant, Catten seeking her only occasionally. I had seen Magda roll a cigarette for him from time to time, while she was deftly making up little smokers

to fill her father's gold case. Yes, occasionally she had tossed Catten one of her rolled ones with a laugh—even lighting one for him. She had often brought over his coffee after dinner when Comitu was being served on the verandah. But from none of these things could I construe more than the lightest sort of interest. In fact, Catten had always appeared queer to me, regarding men and women not as detached entities, but the opposite sides of the same thing. He talked about women somewhat unpleasantly, it seemed to me, the way of a man who can do without them.

"Tell you what, Bowditch," he said after a silence, "you go look Magda over. Here's the key. Talk to her. She's been one of the household for a couple of years. She may be against her old man. It's a shame to keep her under lock and key. I'll do as you decide. Personally I'm a buzzard on these fem-affairs."

I was on the point of suggesting with a yawn that Magda Comitu could wait until morning, when it occurred that this impulse of mine was a brand of inertia I had decided to destroy forever. Then I laughed. Catten was in command. Suggestion from him meant an order

now. I had very nearly missed the fact, and he had been big enough not to change an iota his attitude to me, because of his transfer from comrade to chief. As I fastened on my slippers, I thought of Catten's cryptic remark about the Yellow Lord. Evidently his opinion of the wisdom of our Chinese sick-man was deeply grounded. Presently the frightened voice of Magda answered my knock.

"Who is it?"

"Bowditch."

"But they have locked—I can't let you in."

"I have the key. I wanted to know if I might come," I said.

She was in Hoy Mon's small quarters. The Secretary had taken his place in the anteroom of the Yellow Lord's section since the firing. A single desk lamp was burning here. The room was orderly in its way, but cluttered as a bird cage from the standpoint of an American. Magda seemed larger in this little place—a black-eyed girl, reedy, yet hard as a whip. She had been altogether too inclined to polo-pony-surf-bathing activities to be interesting from my point of view—a prejudice possibly. She had too hard a hand, too cold a control of her

nervous system for games and external bits of daring to attract my eye more than casually. I fancied her completely devoid of that deep dazzle of inner lustre such as I was beginning to attribute to Chireen Holt. These were only opinions. The more a man knows, the less he hazards this sort of thing about other men's girls. Magda took me by the good shoulder, saying, with an inexplicable kind of fervour:

"Where's Catten?"

"He's been bunked for an hour. Rather a strenuous day," I began.

"Why did he send you?"

I suddenly felt blown about between them.

"He locked me up," she said, no anger in the tone. "I should think he would dare to come to me himself, since he locked me up——"

"He didn't like the feel of you being shut up here."

"It's pretty cruel if he takes me for the daughter of Jerry Comitu and no more than that," she said. "It's pretty cruel, with all he knows, if he doesn't give me credit for having a point of view of my own."

"Catten isn't cruel. He sent me here because he didn't like the thought of your being

held like this. There isn't any yellow play going to be put over on you, Magda. We're all at loose ends for the present, but Catten has the look of being altogether four-square to me. I have learned more about our little household here in the last five or six hours than I did in as many weeks before."

At that moment I meant to leave her under lock and key, at least until morning.

"Does he mean to keep me locked up?" she asked.

"What do you know of your father's deal with the natives?" I said.

She appeared to have no thought but of Catten's part even now.

"Did he send you here to question me? If he did, you can go out and turn the key."

I laughed.

"My little part is to be cheerful and good-natured," I said. "Catten appeared to think that I could help him and you, too."

She drew near, her eyes dull and flashing in turn, all the emotions that go to make good drama under clever control.

"Does Catten think I'm in on all this?" she demanded.

"I never know what Catten thinks," I said patiently. "Less and less have I the slightest idea what Catten thinks—or Hoy Mon or the Master himself. Catten told me to turn you loose if I thought best. I think I do. Here's the key to this room. Your old rooms are impossible, of course—a hole in the floor to the powder-magazine and all that."

"Tell Guthrie I want to see him," she said.

"Yes, Miss," I answered.

"Tell him I must see him tonight. If he does not come, I'll go to him."

"Exactly, Miss," I said.

I told Catten.

"She's a bear-cat, all right," he said, rising at once.

He left the room and I lay inadequate on the flat of my back, staring up into the silent flounces of the punkahs.

Catten came back in twenty minutes. He reported that nearly one hundred and ninety of our two hundred Chinos were smoking their dope-canes safely within the walls, or down in the harbour, the main outfit in the bunk-house as usual. This was characteristic of Catten,

who would explain even in detail something absolutely foreign to the thing he had just come from, and about which one was set to hear.

"Holt reported that one of our parties of tea-pickers appeared over on the other side of the harbour by the fishing village," Catten resumed. "He sent out a foreman to round them up over there. It seems they couldn't explain what they were doing near Comitu's headquarters—only that they must have blundered among the trails."

I grunted a little, but said nothing, having shown as much ignorance in various ways as one man should be allowed in a single evening. Catten couldn't sleep. After many minutes he reached over to re-light a partly-smoked cigarette—one that he had saved for the first in the morning. He always started a cigarette the last thing, so that he could find the remains properly steeped and seasoned for the best smoke of next day, which was the first. I was just dropping into a dose when he said lightly:

"Come to think of it—it was Jim Hassey's outfit of tea-pickers that Major Holt found around across the harbour way, only Jim Hassey didn't come in with them."

"He wouldn't leave Jerry," I said, wondering what Catten would say next. . . . Presently I drifted onto a dream of long ago about a water-spaniel I used to own back in Connecticut, as fine a friend as a small boy ever had . . . and I awoke with excited barking outside in the *patio*—Lance Holt's hound, Shiela, in an altogether unusual frenzy of excitement. Catten was on his feet and flashed on the switch, swinging a two-gun belt around his hips and reaching for a rifle over his head. He strode out, laughing, to see me reach for my bath slippers before following suit.

"Come on, you dude," he said. "There's need of us."

The broad court was now lit from end to end. Fifteen or twenty Chinos were crowding at the door of Hoy Mon's small room, now used, as I said, by Magda Comitu. She was at the door. The Chinos closed about her, making a rush toward the forward entrance where the boy, Lance Holt, with a small-bore rifle and his dog, stood together, a kind of hair-raising thrill to me in the little tableau. I joined forces with Lance joyfully enough before the Chinese reached there. At the same time I perceived

Jim Hassey leading the Chinese, and quite on the spur, I let go a shot—at once disturbed by the result. The slim yellow boy forgot his errand suddenly, shook himself loose from his crew and sort of crumpled his members against the wall. I was sick of it all. Now I noticed Chireen by my side.

"For God's sake, Chireen, get back," I begged. "They're going to rush over us. They'll trample you. I'm no good with you here."

She slipped back into a near doorway. Catten was now firing at Hassey's party from the rear. Major Holt from his doorway was emptying a pair of sixshooters into the spoiled outfit of Chinese, but always shooting at the edges to avoid hitting Comitu's girl. Lance and I and the dog took them going over, as they charged out of the doorway with Magda. Right there at the door the prize changed hands. It was like a football slipping out from a massed play, the way Magda cut loose. . . . But a black minute or two after that. I was down, covering the little man. That stiff-tendoned beast, Shiela, was doing her fighting over my face and chest. It was like being tunked with a

crow-bar—the drive of those clawed feet as she dodged and tore into the knifing Chinese. They didn't tarry. They had lost all thought but to get away. Lance's beast left her marks upon me as they went by, for my body was the turf she fought from. Chireen came to me through the smoke.

"I think he's all right—the little master," I said, meaning Lance.

The boy and I sat up at the same time.

"Sure, I'm all right, Mr. Bowditch," he answered, shaking a little as he eyed me.

I thought he was hurt internally from the look of him, but it appears he was choking at the sight of my face. One of the yellow boys had opened me from chin to cheek-bone, and I had to hold my tongue still. . . . There was fighting out in the compound—Catten's voice raised laughingly. Chireen was leading me to her room, staunching the flow from my cheek as we walked. It was an ugly place to bandage.

"What kind of hound is that?" I said to Lance, as Shiela came in presently to find us.

"She's just hound," Lance answered, and I remembered asking that question and receiving the same answer when I first reached Magda-

lena. The fact is, I was a bit embarrassed by all this care, and continually recurring in my mind was the crumpling fall of that Chino, Jim Hassey, whom Comitu must have sent to bring his daughter by force. They had taken Jim's body away when I emerged. Most of my shots had been into the mass, but there were no two ways about that first shot. It's a personal matter to kill a man.

Chireen was telling me in few words how much it meant because I joined Lance. She couldn't hear my explanation that I was very busy most of the time saving myself from those steel-shod drives of Shiela as she attacked. There was something in the touch of the girl's hands that bewildered me. I had never known it elsewhere in this life.

Catten and Magda came in, but the latter turned back, seeing Chireen and me together. Chireen was speaking to Catten about my cut . . . and I saw a look on her face as she talked, as if she had infinite patience and was in no danger of losing control of herself, but still disliked his nearness. . . . A little later I joined Catten in our quarters to try it again. It was one in the morning.

"That's a queer thing about Jim Hassey," he said. "Part of his gang went over with him to Jerry's side, and Jerry sure used them *pronto*."

"How did they get in?" I asked.

"Came in with the others, as if belonging. Jim Hassey came over the wall—joined his beggars at the Gate, and they all slipped in while we were changing guards. Jerry must have wanted his daughter pretty badly, but Magda appears satisfied to play it from this end. That will sort of cripple old Comitu. He sure dotes on that girl."

"I wonder how many more of our Chinese are tainted?" I enquired.

"I'll go after the Yellow Lord himself on that," Catten remarked. "I wouldn't swear by any but Hoy Mon and The Crane and Soling Wai."

There was a long pause, when Catten rose abruptly.

"What now?" I ventured.

"Come to think of it, I'd better see Hoy Mon now for a little social chat," he announced.

13

THE LONG NIGHT *CONTINUED*—I DREAM OF THE HIGHER HAND, AND BREATHE THE DAWN OVER THE TEA-LANDS

I SAT up with a jerk after he had gone. For the first time I realised why the Yellow Lord had wanted his "white young gentlemen" to have military training. This lotus island stuff was in reality ballasted by a powder-barrel. Doubtless the Tsui Tsing Company had known all along the possibilities of fighting for their island privileges. The Yellow Lord was said to know the Malay mind also. I thought I saw it all now. Both Comitu and Holt had been soldiers of fortune in Asia. Comitu was merely playing true to the old revolutionary ideas of Latin America in casting his lot with his idea of the winner—ideals begun back in Duane Street. Still, I wondered why Jerry picked the islanders to win. Also, it

was very clear to me that I had been sleeping, mind and soul, for several weeks, my more or less hungry and thirsty body moving about the castle and grounds, with only one invalid's lamp working, out of a whole switch-full. Magdalena with its tropical fragrances had considerably drugged me—in spite of the turning of my heart to Chireen Holt.

Catten was gone for a long time. I was cast-off at length again for a night's sleep, when I came to with a full-length shock. Hoy Mon was standing at my cot, his hand placed lightly upon mine, touching the knuckles:

"Excuse me, Mr. Bowditch. Follow me. Our Master suggests you join Mr. Catten. Follow me."

This time I arose with the sense of needing a shave. Altogether that was an addled night. Hoy Mon was utterly mysterious and unreadable. His hands were covered now under the folds of his blouse where he kept his keys. I think he would have had paints and pots and brushes on their tray beside him within a half hour after shipwreck and being picked up from an open boat. The Yellow Lord was said to have had the whole Empire to choose from for

a Secretary, and had chosen this Oriental to be a sort of extension of his own brain. In all hours of the night and day I had seen Hoy Mon at work, tireless, silent, courteous, absolutely a master of the weaknesses that were supposed to have mastered his master.

I was taken to the place of a thousand treasures. Before me now, for the first time since the day of my arrival, Tsui Tsing sat like a tailor, rocking upon his ankles—a heavy, swollen sort of sub-human, waiting, as it seemed to me, for some kind of paralytic stroke. Actually my first thought was that he was marked for death—red lights of dropsical brightness in the thick of his neck.

Ancient temples had been desecrated to furnish this room. It was a study of sombre shades, a revelation of what could be done with blacks—densities and suggestions of shadow, pointed off with soft greys and delicate steely blues. The lights were all sheltered—dull gleamings upon the hand-smoothed woods of priceless simplicity, scent of *yasmyn* incense—everywhere the flow of faint light and shade, the like of which is not on land or sea—a subtle sumptuousness of colouring which psychics pro-

fess to be aware of, but which ordinary individuals can only imagine in the flare of drugs and drinks.

The Yellow Lord's hand came out from beneath his dusky robe. I had not noticed it before, though the most startling feature. It did not seem to belong to him; it was as if he were handing forth a priceless ivory treasure; still, cold, neither fleshy nor attenuated, steady, in perfect preservation—the inimitable hand of the Yellow Lord. It touched my wrist lightly —something familiar, even affectionate, in the pat, as one's relative might do when saying: "We have just been talking of you, my dear."

My eyes were held to the hand instead of the face, and the thought in my mind was one of shame and premonition that I had talked lightly, scornfully, of this man's person. Catten had been gentle with me about that. There appeared enough power to rule an empire back of this man's hand—at least, the reflection of such power. Catten, altogether at his ease, squinted sort of rakishly at me, as if to intimate that some time, ages hence, I would begin to understand. Hoy Mon came closer, saying:

"Excuse me, Mr. Bowditch. Our Master

could not rest until he thanked you tonight. I offered to carry his word to your bedside, but our Master resisted the thought. He expressed himself eager to go himself, but there being an incumbency to his limbs at this time of day, he ventured to allow me to presume—to which Mr. Catten gave heart-felt accord. He thanks you."

In the silence that followed I had a brute impulse to turn Hoy Mon upside down and shake out any lingering verbiage in his system. That instant a squeaky voice became audible in the room—a most mysterious and terrifying phenomenon:

"I would like to have been there to see you hold the door!"

No man would forget that. The voice was like the twang of a tuning-fork, and yet far off. It seemed to come out of the mound of flesh below Tsui Tsing's chin, as if an invisible ventriloquist were directing the words toward this fat throat from somewhere outside the room. I had the sense of being forced to accept this, as one having been admitted to a certain family is finally shown the skeleton; or one who has served and worshipped a certain king through

hard years is finally admitted to the presence of a—monster. Tsui Tsing was officially complimenting me for holding back Jim Hassey's Chinese with the help of Lance and Shiela. Catten eased me for a moment with a tiresome remark about the Roman who held the bridge. My left hand was reaching for my right, like a child not sure of himself. I bowed and backed out. I had a puerile impulse to laugh.

Catten had remained. I walked back across the court in a daze, passing Major Holt's door, which was ajar. None had gone to sleep in there. The boy and the dog were on the floor at the door—sentry-work of their own choice. Chireen came to the aperture as I passed.

"Hello," she said, answering my greeting, an intimacy in the depth of her tone which I had never known before. "Hello" can be spoken with the most astonishing inflections. All that did not answer to Chireen Holt in my make-up that moment was utterly wastrel. She stood for my strength and integration, for all that was sweet and normal in the world. All I had known before was diffusion and beating myself thin around the East. Something starry in that moment.

"Don't you sleep?" I asked.

"Yes. We're just getting ready. I think it will be quiet the rest of the night."

She was slow in shutting the door. I found myself lingering to see or say something more. Words slipped, but she helped by asking if I thought my cheek bandage would do for the night. I had no sooner told her it was quite all right than I was consumed with regret, and added an altogether useless "good night" as I passed on. Nothing ahead but the thought of a fresh bandage in the morning.

Catten joined me. We were presently in the dark.

"Are you awake?" I asked at length.

"Huh?" came from him with a yawn.

"Does 'Our Master' always talk like that, Catten?"

"Like what?"

"As if he were used as a mere sounding-board for some speaker outside of the partition?"

"You'll get used to that," Catten said.

"No," said I. "Oh, no, I shall never get used to that."

No audible answer.

"Catten," I began again, "Catten, did Hoy Mon tell him to say that sentence?"

"What sentence?"

I repeated in as like a tone as possible:

"'*I would like to have been there to see you hold the door.*'"

"Hoy Mon's a clerk," I heard Catten growl.

"It sounded as if 'Our Master' had rehearsed it," I went on, "—as if he went over it with Hoy Mon word by word before I came."

Catten had nothing to say to this. I pursued presently:

"Do you suppose the Yellow Lord would undertake to speak for you, if you were looking him straight in the eye?"

Abruptly Catten clapped his hands three times. A servant entered.

"Mix up two——"

He mentioned the Chinese name for a drink we called the *Sequestered Isle*, a drink designed to end the day with. Light was turned on with refreshments, and we crawled out of our bug-proof nettings for the fourth time that night. When the glasses were drained and we found ourselves loath to try the couch again, I suggested calling the servant a second time.

"This is a *Sequestered Isle*, not an archipelago," Catten said, "but I'll try one more."

We might still have slept if it hadn't been for Hoolie, Comitu's little monkey, that came whimpering just now at the windows of our quarters. Hoolie was lonely, no two ways about that. With his master gone, Hoolie insisted upon making his camp under our nettings. He wasn't much bigger than a man's two hands —a most silky and melancholy little tree-man, saddest, most shadowy eyes I've ever looked into. Comitu was a kind of God to him; Comitu would brush him off the table carelessly, and Hoolie would appear all animated as if by the caress. Any one else had to be mighty gentle with the little chap or he would show his teeth and make noises in his neck like a rattle of gold coin in a thick leather purse. . . . The night seemed to be getting hotter. Hoolie left Catten's bunk presently and shook the mosquito curtains over mine.

"It's magnetism he wants, Catten," I remarked. "Something he gets from a man's hand."

"He'll get a wallop from a man's hand if he don't keep away from here," Catten said.

"I think we're all reaching up for some Hand that's Higher—" I muttered dubiously—"woman or God——"

Catten broke in, demanding that I repeat that again. I obeyed.

"I always knew you had a pious streak somewhere, Bowditch," he remarked, staring my way.

After a moment I heard his bare feet on the polished floor and I had a secret suspicion that he was about to bring his wheezy old briar into action. Catten never worked up that pipe of his, except in the most degraded moments. He lit it standing, and I saw the baleful glitter in his eyes and the sick yellow of his narrow face in the flare of the match.

"It's no use," I said, feet once more on the floor. "Hoolie has let in a whole glee club of man-eaters."

The little monkey was moaning and rocking in the place I had left. . . . It was all silent about us. The dawn moisture was distilling itself upon the earth; the *floret* sang far in the jungle, announcing in watery notes that it was day-time; the breeze came to us from the tea-plantations to the north—the sweetest, most

delicate breath of all nature. Chinese will tell you that you never get so wise, never so holy, that you can't be made better by breathing the moist dawn breath from flowering tealands.

14

MIXED ACTIONS WITH CATTEN, COMITU AND CAPTAIN HEMITER DOWN ON THE HARBOUR LEVEL

CATTEN and I were at breakfast when the shriek of a shell from down in the harbour brought his eyes to mine with a quick glance like a true mate. We arose and crossed the compound through the pepper trees to the edge of the cliff. The *Jezebel* lay lovely and unharmed at her moorings. The Chinese sentries on the cliff path informed us that the shell had dropped pitifully short of the Yellow Lord's launch. I somehow got the picture of old Comitu standing dismally across there in the shine of his own boots and spurs.

Many day fires on the far shore indicated a sort of feast on the part of the natives. It was the wrong end of the game, I reflected, for

this sort of celebration. I could see nothing but failure for an outfit that started to feed up before action. My reflections might have reached the point of a humorous remark, if Catten had not moved off just then to give certain orders to the remoter sentries.

Back at our quarters we found that the *savant* of the breakfast room had kept our portions hot. I glanced at the little board between us —a deep dish of gold brown griddle-cakes, covered dishes of toast and eggs served together, brown fishes radiant hot, each in a palm leaf of its own. There was a pot of tea for Catten, the kind that is said to be served in only one other place outside of the Yellow Lord's castle —the boudoir of the dowager at Peking. I preferred coffee, rejoicing to pour many small cups from a silver urn. At our left was a bank of fruits and jugs of clotted cream.

The tension that morning was indescribable. It was more than missing a night's sleep—this heaviness of the silence and the looks that passed from one to another as we moved in the court and the compound. I remember the face of Chireen Holt as she unwound me from a head-bandage and turned me loose with

a plaster on my cheek instead. I remember Catten and Magda talking together as I emerged across the compound at the edge of the pepper trees.

The whole thing was so natural that I had almost forgotten her father's effort to snatch her out of the Yellow Lord's establishment in the night. Was Comitu's attempt the ungovernable fervour of a parent, or was Magda against his free lance tendencies as a revolutionist? Was he afraid that she might be prevailed upon to do or say something against his interest? It was somewhat complicated. Catten lifted his hand presently for me to come across. Magda passed me on the way back to the court. Catten and I walked on toward the edge of the cliffs again.

"I don't get her," he said. "She's a great little Magda. Wouldn't it be queer if she really wanted to be good?"

I had nothing to say, being unable to penetrate the glassy glitter in his eyes, and refusing to trust my own opinions on Comitu's daughter. We stood on the cliff together and saw the fires of the natives on the shore opposite. The sun glanced on the brasswork of the four

little pieces of ordnance. The corrugated iron roofs of the Yellow Lord's tea go-downs lay like large loose-woven tweeds spread out at the edge of the water.

"Run back, Bowditch," Catten said presently, "and keep your eye peeled around the grounds. I'm going to saunter down to the *Jezebel* for an hour or two."

It was a drowsy day. I moved from the court to the compound, across the pepper grove to the *patio* and out to the rear gate, it seemed a score of times. Hoy Mon frequently accosted me to inquire if Catten had returned. Sentries from Major Holt, still on duty on the *Jezebel*, reported that Catten had only stepped on board for a moment early in the morning and had not been seen since.

The five hours till noon passed, and my eyes stung from searching the grounds for Catten's Rajput helmet. Chireen Holt joined me for a moment or two, but I had not the nerve to take a lift from her companionship. Night was on, and I had changed the guards in the compound; Chinese were stationed at different parts of the wall and the gates were heavily guarded, when I saw Hoy Mon emerge from the Yellow

Lord's quarters and move rather intently toward the front gate. I followed and saw Catten's narrow countenance in the flare of a match as he lit one of his interminable cigarettes.

"Hello," he said to me, over Hoy Mon's shoulder. "Have you got the kettle on? I've been tied up all day between two sand dunes—yellow flowers on one side, purple flowers on the other, lying still as a lizard——"

It appeared that he had made a reconnoiter over Comitu's territory, and seen much that was interesting, but had been unable to cross an open stretch of shore to reach the castle trail until darkness. The Islanders had extended their guards to our walls on either side.

"Comitu's four guns command the channel," Catten observed. "He is not so interested in the *Jezebel* as we thought—not yet."

"Day after tomorrow the *Virgin* is due to come in," I observed.

"Yes, she's due day after tomorrow," Catten drawled. "Only she'll come in tomorrow morning instead. In fact, she's lying up outside in the offing now."

Emphatically this was news. I saw that Catten had been thinking about it for hours, and

anything I might say would be tiresome to him. Evidently he approved of my repression, for he deigned to talk:

"Of course it would be to Comitu's advantage to prevent her carrying back news to Singapore that there's war on down here," he said.

"But do you think he'd try to sink the Chinese Insular's best trading ship?" I asked.

"He may figure on it taking some days to get to the castle," my friend mused. "He isn't going to run the risk of letting old Hemiter steam his *Virgin* back to the mainland with the news of these doings. A lot of people get interested in an island when she takes on like this, whether they have any particular call or not. Comitu's out to make a life-time stake, and he don't care any more about the Chinese Insular than you or I do."

"We've got everything here, Catten," I said with suppressed jubilation. "The whole game is right here—island, castle, troops, and everything at stake, besides two or three women to stand by——"

"Have you been *Sequestering?*" he asked.

"I haven't taken a drink today," I answered gloomily.

"We're due right now," he said, and cleared his throat, adding: "This is going to be a sea war. And say, don't you get honing too hard for action. Comitu is weathered. He don't make war just as you do in America, but he has his novel points, old Jerry has. He's got the natives dazzled over there. Moustache waxed stiff, red uniform for mid-day, green for dinner. He and Labulamo move delicate, and doubtless are together. It wasn't just a whim—his passing out from our midst yesterday, but I think he meant to leave us devastated a lot more."

"—And the *Virgin* coming into harbour in the morning," I repeated.

Catten was quiet a moment.

"Our little *Jezebel* has been getting more and more important from where I stand, all day," he said. "If Comitu takes the *Virgin* tomorrow, it looks to me as if we've got to stand by the *Jezebel* as the one way out. She's worth her weight in tea-flowers to the Yellow Lord."

"Are you going to let Comitu take the *Virgin?*"

Catten cooled his eye on me for several wearing seconds.

"He's got the artillery," he answered. "The *Virgin* will pass tomorrow morning along the channel directly within reach of his four Sanguinaries, and Comitu hasn't missed any dope; also he plays a good game of draw poker."

Catten added absently:

"If you don't mind, Bowditch, I'll leave you to handle things up here. I'm going down to sleep on board the *Jezebel* tonight. I'm more at home on the naval-end."

"So is Comitu," I answered.

We drank, and I found that I liked him dangerously well that minute, as we stood together.

Catten sent for me in the first light of daybreak. Things were shipshape in the court and compound when I hurried down the ledge-trail to the decks of the *Jezebel* where my friend stood watching the mouth of the harbour. His left hand came out to me, but his eyes did not leave the entrance.

"She's under way," he remarked. "I'm look-

ing for her nose to be shoved in any second now——"

He referred to the *Virgin*. I knew from the lurking devil in his eye that he was about to speak of Hemiter. He chuckled, and sure enough:

"He'll need to be told the Word of Salvation once again," he muttered. "The old Girl will have to lean down and whisper it again—when Hemiter passes along the channel under Comitu's brass-throated quartet. . . . Oh, Gawd, if I could only be aboard when that string's pulled."

His hand gripped me again. With the first sunlight the *Virgin* entered. She was moving like a clay-white shadow against the brown wall of the far cliffs. Catten's eyes were on the small boats directly below, lying forward and abaft the *Jezebel*. He had a look of calculation as he said quickly:

"Comitu may not fire after all. . . . Oh, I say, Bowditch, run up and get thirty or forty of your little tea-planters with their rifles—just their rifles. Bring the liveliest of them."

I didn't grasp his plan, yet I had a string of sleepy yellow boys coming down on the trail

behind me within fifteen minutes after Catten had mentioned his idea. Sleepy—yes, drugged and more or less helpless in the first hour or two of the day, for they passed the nights with their dope-canes. . . . Catten took the Chinese as they came and filed them into the small boats gathered at the stern of the *Jezebel*. Meanwhile the *Virgin* had slowly passed the entrance rocks, and sung Hemiter's siren-announcement of his arrival, a signal which all the Islanders knew. I imagined hate in it that morning. Catten's eye gleamed balefully in the screaming diminuendo.

"Yes, you're here, old top. We hear you. We welcome you—as never before—you and the Missus from Paumnok, and the Word of Salvation that will die with you."

Even now I hadn't arrived at Catten's thought in sending me for the Chinese. I had somehow lost myself in the idea that Jerry would scatter the wits of the *Virgin's* crew by a shot or two; in fact, I couldn't see why he was so serious about the four pieces of ordnance, except for the purpose of commanding the channel from his side of the harbour. It was not until the *Virgin* was sliding into the

perfect range for this *coup* that I saw what the next move from across was to be, and which Catten had been keen enough to anticipate. A long snaky island *banco*, a fourteen native craft, slipped out toward the channel from the opposite shore. Catten stood still, I glancing into his face from time to time. Another *banco* followed in the frescoed line from the outriggers of the first, and still another.

"Yes," Catten drawled, "Mr. Hemiter is going to be welcomed to feed his soul this day! Come on, Bowditch; we're part of the ceremony."

"You surely made a fine guess," I muttered.

"I used to play draw poker with Comitu," he answered, and added: "Take charge of our tail-boat, Bowditch, and follow in close. Keep the *Virgin* in between us and Comitu's canoes."

The Chinese were already at the oars; boat followed boat of ours until the fifth and last which I boarded. . . . All this time the seriousness of the prospect sank deeper and deeper among my faculties. Catten stood up in the stern of his leading boat and making a trum-

pet of his hands. announced to me from thirty yards away:

"They've got numbers, but remember, we've got rifles, in case we run afoul of Jerry's outfit. Keep him from seeing us as long as you can."

I nodded that I understood. Also I saw that Catten considered it as mighty important for me thus to get the exact situation, inasmuch as he explained aloud like that. I never knew a man who so hated to raise his voice. . . . I tell you again, I didn't care for the prospect—a battle in small boats, or possibly on decks, for the possession of the *Virgin*, and the possibility of a big party of natives flanking around to scale the wall with only poor old Major Holt back there in command at the castle. At least, it wasn't for myself that I was chilled and slowed-up that moment crossing the harbour. . . .

We kept the *Virgin* between us and the Islander's *bancos*. Apparently so far we hadn't been observed even from the ship. We were close up to the green rust-flecked plates, but there were no signs of natives on the decks. Comitu on the other side had not boarded, so far. Presently out of the silence we heard old

Hemiter's voice faintly over the bulge of his craft and from the far rail:

"No, Comitu—no, Mister, I ain't allowing, even in good feelings, a lot of mostly-naked Malays running these decks—no, not even in inducements of friendship——"

15

MUCH SOUTH SEA TALK, SOME GENTLE ACTION AND CATTEN MISSES A CHANCE TO SPOIL THE ENEMY

HEMITER was like that. If the island had sent out a delegation to greet him as Messiah, he would have insulted the commission and considered himself honest and dutiful. I heard Catten chuckle and the big voice of Comitu now, still from the water-level:

"Look here, you fool Skipper, we've got something for you! . . ."

There was a blur at this point. Comitu's voice was heavy and low. It lacked carrying qualities; it smeared and ran together. On the contrary, Hemiter's sleety tones were not to be missed. We heard fragments and detached nothings from Jerry for a moment or two, then he blew up. I heard his crude curse—crude

and crawling and prolonged. It wouldn't wear ink—a curse like that. He had doubtless been pleading and cajoling and commanding, perhaps for several minutes, with his face turned up from the water. He now outlined emphatically that the Islanders didn't intend to suffer any kind of "fish-chested, burnt Canadian" like Hemiter to make light of Magdalena's most grandiose society and overtures for perpetual friendship. True South Sea talk. I saw the calm satisfaction on Catten's face, and that Hemiter's imperviousness was incalculable strength to our cause.

And now we began to be busy on our side of the ship. Lafferty, Hemiter's first officer, appeared at the rail above us, the shady and neglected side of the *Virgin*. His mouth opened and he slowly announced to his amazed self that he would be forgotten as a husband and father and cast in the uttermost parts . . . if here wasn't Catten and five boatloads of the Yellow Lord's "tea-picking black smokes."

"Exactly," Catten drawled.

I never admired my friend's nerve more than that moment. I had a dozen ideas on the tip

of my tongue to blurt out, in a fierce pressure of hope to get to the deck before Comitu.

"Honest, what's doing?" Lafferty asked.

"It's a holiday. We came out to meet you. Toss a jumpin' rope over and I'll come up and tell you about it."

Lafferty bawled for a rope-ladder and tossed it overside a moment later. Catten managed to get close enough to me to whisper, as he began to climb:

"Follow me up, Bowditch, and tell your men to follow after you, one by one, rapidly, without words. I'll keep Lafferty's eyes busy."

He rode the treads of that rope-affair leisurely. I saw his long thin legs swing over the rail—broad hips and narrow shoulders almost like the time I saw him first in the frock coat at Singapore. I didn't know Catten yet, but I knew a lot more than on that day. . . . I was close behind, and below me the ladder was crowded with Chinese, according to Catten's order. Lafferty had just loosed my friend's hand to take mine when the first of the natives tumbled over the rail behind me.

"Hai, none of that——"

The words were from Lafferty as he bent

forward to shove the first Chino back. Just in that second his eyes bulged because he saw the ladder crowded with Orientals down to the green of the water. Lafferty was about to fall into the high-sea habit of strong language when Catten caught him securely, closing the passages of speech.

"I'm sorry, Lafferty," he said. "This isn't personal. I've nothing against you Irish, but I do want thirty or forty of my body attendants to board with me. . . . A misunderstanding on your part——"

Catten turned to me at this point and remarked:

"Good, Bowditch. I didn't think you had the wallop in your left hand."

I had just put to brief sleep the boatswain of the *Virgin*. He had come forth a bit of gorilla-like, to the rescue of his first officer.

"Toss him overside for the present. He's coming to and'll raise a row," Catten added.

A Chinese helped me raise the boatswain, ankle and wrist. The rest was heave and splash until I observed with relief that he could swim like a seal. Between us, Lafferty, who

was inclined to continue the struggle, went over after the boatswain. Catten now remarked:

"Mr. Hemiter appears still to be occupied with the intrusive Mr. Comitu. Jerry really ought not to insist on a welcome like this. I never could push myself on anybody——"

"No, you'd just commit assault on the door-tender," I answered.

Catten looked playful as he ordered the five Chinese still remaining below with the small boats, to assist Lafferty and the boatswain out of the water, and mount guard over these two prisoners. Leaving our force in array on the shady side of the ship in the lee of the main-deck cabins, Catten and I moved forward.

Perceiving Comitu lose his temper, Captain Hemiter had ensconced himself more firmly in the idea of his own infallibility. He stood on his bridge now, daring to be silent, arms folded, engrossed in his own power—the most morally unappetizing spectacle I had seen yet. . . . From far forward Catten and I ventured a glance overside where Comitu stood in the prow of one of his *bancos*, his face flaming with rage against the barrier which the person of the skipper had raised against him. Just at

the moment we glanced Hemiter craned over from the bridge and caught Comitu's eye once more, like one who tantalises a caged animal. At this point we heard our Jerry saying slowly:

". . . Right now, Deacon Frog-mouth, I'm going to blow you out of the water—hear me?"

The threat continued:

"I wanted to spare you this, Hemiter. I came to spare you and bring you safety for your ship and all hands, but you threw me down, and now I'm going to blow you out of the water——"

I turned to Catten, who didn't move, though it appeared to me that Comitu was really about to give the signal to his gunners ashore. I jerked my friend back from the rail, looking him in the eye, catching some of his coldness of manner as I inquired:

"You're not going to let him do that, are you?"

"Do what, Bowditch?" he inquired in his most exasperating way.

"Blow her out of the water," I said patiently.

"No gentleman would permit anything like that," Catten answered, glancing overside again.

At this moment I saw one of Hemiter's waiters report something to the old man that stirred him far more than Comitu's presence had done. He turned with a rush to our side of the ship, and at the exact instant of his looking down the first shell of the day shrieked over the *Virgin's* hurricane deck, puncturing one of the lifeboats forward and passing on in haste.

My legs turned weary for a second, and I heard Catten's voice:

"You see, Bowditch, we can play rescue party for Mr. and Mrs. Hemiter now, instead of being taken for an attacking force, as would have happened before Comitu showed his hand. Lucky the Captain didn't see us earlier——"

"Forgive me for being slightly affected by your flashing intelligence," I said.

"—Besides, we should have been forced to murder Comitu to prevent him from giving that signal——"

"That's what I thought you were about to do when you leaned overside. It's war, isn't it?" I said slowly.

"One hesitates. I've played a lot of draw poker with old Jerry. One hesitates, you know."

16

IN WHICH THE FIGHTING QUICKENS AND IS CARRIED FROM THE HARBOUR TO THE COMPOUND

SOME things are run rather well on this little red earth after all. I mean from the Inside. Hemiter always thought well of himself — extremely — and never more so than a moment since, when he saw Comitu's mind break training before his own calmness and self-control. A man so strongly intrenched as Hemiter in his own sense of right isn't seriously disturbed by the curse of another, the curse being an expression of failure. But suddenly to realise his own *Virgin* under fire from the shore of one of the stillest and sunniest harbours in the world, and at the same moment to find her irreproachable decks the parade grounds for thirty-five armed Chinese, himself caught between these two ulti-

mate disasters . . . altogether the Captain was loosed and let down considerably, to the calm delight of Mr. Catten, who helped none whatever.

Captain Hemiter ran from one side of his bridge to stare down at the row of tea-pickers, and to the other to see if the scintillating shore had heaved forth some volcanic wrath. His frightened eyes then roved from the smashed boat down to the sardonic face of Comitu, now a considerable distance from the inhospitable sides of the *Virgin*. Finally Captain Hemiter settled on Catten, his own peculiar and natural devil; and now his eyes were held, his thin grey lips making round O's of amazement and curly S's of scorn and hatred. As I knew Catten, he was not at his highest best that instant. He wasn't what you would call spiritual. . . . A second shot had just crumpled the reinforced rim of the *Virgin's* brick-red smoke stack, and words came at last to the Skipper—feeble and futile and gasping—words addressed to his devil:

"And now what have you got to say for yourself, sir?"

"Me, sir?" Catten asked.

"I'm looking at you——"

"Just greetings, Captain Hemiter, and to Missus Hemiter, greetings and——"

The third shell breezed past the bridge without touching.

"Greetings and suggestion—that you order some speed up, if you care to save your ship, sir. Just a suggestion——"

Catten would never have offered the cue if he had not some personal interest in the welfare of the *Virgin*. Never before in that tight and tortuous channel did the engineer get bells for full speed. The throb of returned power was under the *Virgin's* decks. The Skipper cooled himself somewhat in bringing his ship around the harbour to the Tsui Tsing buoy, as he alone knew the passage. Four or five shots went wide in the next three minutes, then one undertook to bore a new hole for the anchor chain far forward above the forecastle. This gallied Hemiter's wits a second time, and he called to Catten in tones a man never forgets from another. Still below, I saw my friend stroll across the bridge —saw his shoulders grasped in Hemiter's two hands, and heard the words:

"Take 'em off—for me, please, Mr. Catten! Take 'em off——"

"Take what off, Captain?"

"Your Chinese. That's what they're shootin' at, isn't it? No one would shoot at *my* ship."

"It might look so, but my Chinese don't make up your Jonah, Skipper. We're the rescue party. See Comitu's *bancos?*"

Hemiter was cruelly frightened and distracted. He followed Catten's pointed finger overside, where the seven war boats were streaking back toward shore. For the first time he seemed to understand what he had missed in refusing to let the natives come on board. The whole harbour, the world, and life at large were betraying Hemiter's ideas just now. I turned away, as I had done at first, from Catten's mental mauling of the sorrowful old innocent. Hemiter's face had something I would have covered up out of pity—a bearded man in fright. It somehow made me ashamed to be in the world. Meanwhile below in the spray, our small boats were in tow, with five Chinese in charge of Lafferty and the boatswain. As a rattler would turn negligently from a rat already stung, Catten left Hemiter and remarked almost affectionately to me:

"I don't think you'll lose any time by riding with us over to the *Jezebel* landing——"

I didn't pretend to get his plan. The remark seemed superfluous, since the *Virgin* was making the delicate passage across the harbour at a speed only permitted in wide sea-room on charted waters.

"The point is," Catten added, "you're to hurry back to the castle now. Leave me most of these Chinese to keep the *Virgin*. . . . We may have to take her outside of the entrance if Comitu's cannon begin to negotiate the distance across the harbour."

"His first shot fell short of the *Jezebel* moorings yesterday," I said.

"He might only have been feeling for range——"

"But," I said, "if you ever get outside of the harbour, Hemiter won't slow up until he sees Asia."

"No?" Catten said quizzically.

I signified that I regarded it so.

"Hemiter doesn't know it yet," Catten drawled. "I may not have to tell him today. This has been a hard day for Captain Hemiter so far, and I may spare him today, but rightly

speaking, he isn't in command of the *Virgin* from now on. He only thinks he is."

My friend glanced back toward the native's side of the shore. It was about time for another shot. The sun flashed into his eyes as his head turned, and I saw the coldest glint there—an integrated deviltry altogether challenging, yet I had a suspicion this was only the surface armour. He couldn't have pulled me so with this alone. Anyway he was running this campaign to suit me, except, possibly, his baiting of Hemiter. I couldn't forget how he had out-guessed Comitu so far at every point, proving himself ready and on the spot for all the moves the other made.

Especially I was touched with Catten's strange mercy when he let pass the chance to put Comitu out of the reach of further damage. I wouldn't have cared to murder Jerry that moment, but I felt less tender to him than Catten seemed to—tenderness not being my English friend's most characteristic weakness, either. His action now was something to keep secret; it wasn't good service to the Yellow Lord to have permitted Comitu to escape a few moments before, as we looked over the *Virgin's*

rail at the native canoes making for shore. Catten was a pistol-shot. He could even have winged Comitu without killing him. You'll smile, but I harboured the suspicion right there that Catten had been afraid of stopping his war altogether if he put over such a *coup* at the beginning.

The last shot of the forenoon was widest of all. We were slowed down again, coming into the buoy anchorage close to the *Jezebel*, which lay at dock. I saw that the bigger craft formed an admirable protection for Tsui Tsing's steamer as the former lay at the Company's moorings. Catten had declared that the *Jezebel* could be cleared from dock in half a minute. No surprise was possible since the shores were guarded, and the walls held the heights.

"Send up Lafferty and the Bosun," he ordered, as I climbed down. "We can use them here."

"Do you think you've got force enough to manage the ship and Lafferty and Hemiter, too?" I asked softly.

"Your motherly spirit fans me to deep peace," he answered. "Send me down anything

particularly choice you happen to have for luncheon. You know what I think of Hemiter's pantry."

I waved at him, and presently, as I was being pulled ashore, I saw that he was turning the stern of the *Virgin* out toward the hostile shore —a new use for the anchorage, but no broadside exposed. I never knew how narrow-chested the *Virgin* was until that moment I saw her in the turning. And now a gladness came over me at the thought of going back to the castle. It seemed as if a big task had been well done out in the harbour . . . and that Chireen would be pleased when I told her. Before reaching the top of the ledge, I heard Shiela's barking. Lance was there, beckoning in excitement.

The fear in my heart was crippling. I hate to confess it, but crippling is the word. I wasn't a free man, not the man of a day or two before. The barking and beckoning preyed upon me, lest something had happened to Chireen. So far as the castle was concerned, that was war merely. One used nerve for that, not emotion like this.

"Oh, come on, Mr. Bowditch, it's a race! It's a race!"

This was from Lance, who caught my hand at the top of the cliff, dragging me forward. It was the busiest moment ever known so far within the wall. A half hundred Chinese were running toward me across the compound, and through the pepper trees. The southern wall, five hundred yards away, was black with heads of Comitu's Islanders. At that instant I heard the crash of their first firing—a ragged volley, and the wall was draped in smoke.

It meant a race, as Lance said, to reach the castle before a charge of the natives. It also meant that we must pass through their firing to cross the compound, possibly a fight to reach the gate—all of which was stuff to make a laugh out of, except now I saw Chireen at the head of the Chinese running toward us. She was coming to bring us in, altering the whole picture for me. . . . I caught Lance by the hand, yelled to my little party, and we ran toward her.

Even in the strain I saw that the big party of tea-pickers she brought to our rescue was a bit crumbly under fire. They didn't like the

volley from the natives. Much of Tsui Tsing's ammunition was fired in the air by the yellow ones in their first test. Their eyes were as wide open and staring as their rifle muzzles, their mouths distended to a much wider bore. The castle had magnetised them, and their speed to enfold us in protection was not considerable. Far behind, running toward us, was Major Holt himself, evidently out of hand entirely with his family, whom he had not chosen for this rescue expedition. I begged Chireen back, but there was no instant indication of obedience from her. Somehow I had lost Lance's hand for a second —yet I held a hand.

"It was wonderful of you"—I panted—"it was wonderful of you to come, Chireen, but this isn't your sort of thing."

I wasn't sure of her words. I wasn't sure of the pressure of her hand. It was an altogether astonishing moment there in the crash of the firing. It seemed to me that she said:

"It isn't yours, either——"

Then her glance turned quickly to see if Lance were all right, and I saw the same grey eyes scan me full-length as we ran—the Chinese close about us, much gibberish and firing

and dust in the air. And now Comitu's jungle outfit was pouring over the wall in two thin streams. I brought the Chinese to a halt with some difficulty—sought to make them check the Islanders with thirty or forty seconds of well-directed shooting. Meanwhile I tried to make the woman hurry on, but she wouldn't leave. Our party stood under my yells and threatening, but their firing disgraced me before my own mind, something the same as Hemiter's cowardice. . . . The one sorry fact was that the Islanders were no better, and their arms were fewer and mainly obsolete.

We weren't holding them enough to warrant the halt. I saw that the forward Islanders were as close to the castle as we were. I called to my party to double-time again, shoving Chireen into the thick of the runners for protection. The shock came less than fifty yards from the big gate. Major Holt had reached us now. Even in the thick of things, excited Chinese on every side, my eyes looked deep into his face. . . . His arms were outstretched, his mouth opening and shutting with commands I could not make out in the din. It must have all happened in a second or two, but I have

always noticed in great stresses, certain parts happen as queerly as in a dream—a whole scene between a clock-tick, things said and done. . . . I saw the big man's mouth open and shut, his red tortured face, sweat covered and distressed; then it all seemed to get calm and white like a prayer for an instant before my eyes—then sank in the sickening ruction.

The queerest thing about it all, and something that made it even more like a dream, was that I utterly forgot this particular little film in the next few seconds of hand to hand. . . . We were being cut up some. I was close to Chireen in the thick of the rough square of Chinese, fighting our way into the gate. There was that snoring from the wounded underfoot that goes with the use of the knife. Lance dropped, but it was only from the tangle of the fighting—Shiela at his knees.

As for me, there was six-shooter stuff which I refuse to dilate upon. I don't care for seeing too closely what one does in action. It's interesting from outside to isolate one's actions of this sort; it certainly makes good films, but I had all I cared for in this sort of adventure,

with Jerry's boy, Jim Hassey. I repeat, it's a personal matter to kill a man. . . . Nor do I care to remember much the mess we left in the compound—some of our fallen still alive. It wouldn't have happened—I swear to you I would have brought in all the wounded, except for the woman in the party, and Lance. . . . I started to make a further explanation, but it didn't look well-told enough to leave. It's queer that when one is making explanations, even trying to make his own part a little better, words don't flow as easily. One's voice is tiresome in excuses. . . .

But I did run back and get Major Holt. Heavy to carry, the big man was, and Chireen was leaning over him under the arch of the gate, even before we succeeded in getting the big teak doors together against the butting of the Islanders. . . . A moment of red hell. We fired leisurely now, from loopholes within the castle, the Chinese by no means so helpless with their rifles when they were under cover themselves. The natives couldn't stand this sort of picking long, and presently the compound was clear. . . .

It was high noon. I was sewing up Shiela's breast. A knife had lain her open rather badly, but only grazed the inner works. . . . A kind of a devil and heroine—that dog. Lance was God to her. She would have torn my throat out, hurt as she was, if he hadn't stood by talking to her all the time I sewed. Each time I folded in the needle, she would forget herself in the pain and turn to me with a flash of her head and a deep rumble in her broad chest. Then a word from Lance would set her straight again. Once she bumped my arm with her locked teeth, lips lifted in a killing snarl. There was about five inches to draw together, and the boy had to stay beside me in the work. Meanwhile Chireen came forth. . . . She watched a moment and understood. She waited until I had finished before whispering to Lance: "Come in quickly now. He needs you a moment."

She followed him to their quarters after a second. It was not until then I remembered the moment in the fighting on the compound, just as her father received his death wound—the face of world-worn man softening into peace and prayer.

17

A BREATHING INTERVAL IN WHICH HOY MON TELLS ME OF THE GREATNESS OF THE YELLOW LORD

I FOUND Hoy Mon in the anteroom and reported what had happened down in the harbour. He listened without confusion. Leaving me to stand by the door, he went to a certain cabinet on the wall, took forth the key from under the flowered blouse and opened the door. He stared for several moments into the cabinet, as one might look at a mirror. The swinging door was between Hoy Mon and myself, so I could not see what he looked at so carefully without lifting his hands.

The anteroom was dim and formal—a thick mosque-like arch entering the Yellow Lord's quarters. Hoy Mon seemed more to belong here than in the little room which he had oc-

cupied formerly. Here was more space for his pencil and brush litter; in this cool deep space I could see the marvellous order underlying his mind and complicated sets of effects, as I could not see them in the tighter quarters. The door of the cabinet was closed carefully, the key returned to the venerable breast. All Hoy Mon's keys were unattached to each other. His slender hand merely disappeared in need and came forth with the right one. There were many different locks to his establishment and I imagined the keys arranged in rows there across his breast like the implements of a very complete toilet set in a fancy box. There were numerous other cabinets on the walls, and another heavy stone arch entering I knew not where, similar to the door to the thousand treasures, including Tsui Tsing. Hoy Mon perceived my interest.

"Yes, Mr. Bowditch," he said, "there is much of the outstanding and indicative here——"

"I don't get it."

"You must explain the idiom," he replied serenely. "Mr. Catten is a living idiom. My English is by the book."

Many things occurred to me to say, but I merely marked time with an "Ah——"

"In proper course of time you will be given to understand," he added.

I raised my eyebrows, signifying that I would be content to understand now what he meant that I should understand later.

"You are being tried," Hoy Mon continued. "It is unfortunate that you could not be tried in earlier case, before our war, but that was impossible."

"That is, if I knew more what was going on and what really is wanted of me, I could do what was expected more expeditiously and well——"

"Exactly," said Hoy Mon. "But in good time."

He beckoned me to the mysterious arch just mentioned, and drawing forth a key, swung a door of great thickness that led down into a narrow passage absolutely black.

"This," said Hoy Mon, "is the tunnel to the bunk-house of our labourers. It enables us to keep them near, yet apart—the perfect plan of our master, of whom you know so little. . . . For example, in this small cabinet at the

side I could determine if any one were in the passage—something of the number, direction, so to speak."

"Does Jerry Comitu know of this passage, Hoy Mon?"

He bowed. "It is very unfortunate. Yes. For this reason. I dare to tell you so early. . . ." He raised his hand, adding: "Ah, it is early, Mr. Bowditch, though you have seriously been tested and tried. Still, you must observe that our tests and trials of him who has deserted our party have proved inadequate——"

"So long as we remaining all want the same thing, we can get along as it is," I said thoughtfully.

"Ah, but that is impossible in the world of trade, and in the island life——"

It appeared I had struck a particular bit of his oriental philosophy, for he continued rapidly:

"It was an ideal of the ancient and honourable house of Tsui Tsing all to want the same thing. The chief in his palace, the salesman with his box, the labourer in the fields—all to want the same thing . . . but sadly we have fallen from

the eminence of that, Mr. Bowditch. Sadly we have fallen to no good use. . . . Mr. Catten wants one thing, as we perceive; Mr. Comitu wants another, Mr. Major another, and Mr. Bowditch the same of his own. Soberly we sit down together like all the different animals invited—a smile of peace, a heart of hell's-fire. . . . Listen, all this—the wisdom of the ages —shall not avail——"

I followed his lean white long-nailed hand which seemed to indicate more now than the objects of the anteroom—the castle, court and compound, the fields, the island itself.

"The wisdom of the ages is gathered together in the structure and establishment, and all is the working of the genius of our Master," he said in lowered tone. "His plan, the house and lands, the whole plan of our life, the fruits of many centuries of his genius and the genius of his fathers. But all this shall pass away, because a few white men do not want the same thing."

"But why did white men enter into this ancient trading Company?"

Hoy Mon stared toward the great door of the Yellow Lord's with loving apology and

sustained posture. My mind roved irreverently back, covering two scenes, the man I had fought the first day, and the more recent effigy from which the perfect hand had come forth. Hoy Mon spoke:

"Alone he was at the head of our honourable Company. Yet his heart went not out to it, but to things of beauty and culture; his the soul of an artist, Mr. Bowditch, not a master merchant."

I rubbed my eyes a bit. . . . In spite of all I had seen and heard, I seemed to know less. Hoy Mon had given Catten command of the defence work of the whole establishment, but seemed to have no great faith or admiration for Catten's part or parts. Mysterious as it appeared, Hoy Mon did not seem to have joy in the managing of the tea estates or the island, and yet from every point of view he was the manager. . . . After all, I found him sound somehow, and good for me, his garments very sweet, and his face pure. . . . It was the pedagogue I saw in him today—the beaked nose and spectacled eyes, the serious, deeply-intent master of little things. I was forgetting the phantom that had looked out at me from the

page of the *North China News* way back in Shanghai. . . . Emerging into the court, Lance met me with the word that his father had died.

18

IN WHICH THE MOST IMPORTANT AFFAIR OF ALL IS TAKEN UP AND SET DOWN AGAIN UNDER THE BANYAN TREE

A LONG, quiet day. As the sun went down, I waited in the compound by the big banyan tree for Chireen to come. The great plant grew low, with beards of loose woven hemp clinging to its venerable trunk. From the outer side of this tree the windows of the castle were cut off from sight, and there was a cane seat facing the west. . . . Chireen seemed older—more woman than girl, and there was a sweetness suffusing her that seemed a part of my longing and impatience for her coming. Perhaps there is no sense to that saying, but I saw something that another would not have seen; nor could I have seen it except for the great restless calling in my heart.

We spoke no words, though she touched my hand. Over to the southwest the land sloped. We could see the golden mist of the sunset lying upon the tea-fields. A sweetness came in to us from the earth, all heated and teeming with the sun's fierce strength—a sweetness that is highest to me, even above the rose, above the mignonette and the finer lilies—the perfume of the flowering tea-lands. This is my meaning of romance, and that fragrance about her which I cannot describe has something to do with it. The sunset was around her head and shoulders in that hour. . . . We spoke of her father, and about the fight of the morning.

". . . But, Chireen," I said, "how did you know I was coming up the ledge just then? How did you happen to send out a party for me?"

"I cannot tell," she answered. "First we heard Shiela barking at the walls. She was running along the walls, sensing something we could not see or hear. Lance went out before I knew what the barking meant. The natives were there, but they did not kill Lance—I mean, they did not fire upon him then, because——"

"It would have given their movement away before they were ready."

"Yes, that's what we thought. I ran out to bring him in. Suddenly I knew it meant an attack. Lance seemed to know it at the same time, and of course I—we thought of you."

"But I was with Catten——"

"I knew you would not stay long from us."

I was thinking. Presently it occurred that I had said nothing for several moments, and I announced hurriedly:

"Catten's a wonder, Chireen."

This aroused no particular enthusiasm. I remembered her look of queer withdrawal when Catten was in the same room.

"He seems to use something of the same process you do—intuition, I mean."

"Does he?" she asked.

I told her how he had outguessed Comitu—been there with the parry, so to speak, before each thrust of the other.

"I think it is a game to him," she said quietly. "I think he loves it. I think you don't understand him quite. It's a game to him—this war. It makes him happy."

"You mean he doesn't want it to stop?" I

asked, thinking of his chance to *get* Comitu down in the harbour this morning.

"He wants to win," she answered. "He'd stop it before he would risk losing, but next to that he wants the *play* of it."

It was like being with Catten. I had nothing to say. I was getting an earnest conviction that my faculties were generally second rate. Neither Catten nor Chireen could have made me see differently . . . and as a matter of fact, and as you shall see, it was the best thing I had just then. A man tied up in his own thought-forms and opinions and notions of himself isn't in good condition to have his days cast in the midst of subtleties such as these. At least my mind was open. . . . As I cogitated, the upper rim of the sun disappeared, and I smelled the cool ocean, and the dusk was in the haze upon the tea-lands and in the suffusion of soft red gold about her head. I stepped closer, and I said:

"Chireen!"

"Yes?"

"Chireen, why didn't I see you before, like this—I mean, weeks ago, when I first came?"

"I don't know."

The look upon her face was very much as if it were my business to find out.

"Chireen, I never saw anyone—just like you are now——"

"I was thinking, it was strange—too," she answered.

"Not strange, but wonderful—something one cannot tell—something that pervades even thoughts. But I feel I shall never forget. I never saw anyone so—lovely——"

I spoiled it by hesitating before the last word. When I reached that far I couldn't think of the right thing to finish with. The word I used would have done well enough, but I handled it lamely. Just then Chireen said something that I have never come to the end of. I have thought about it a thousand times, but it still brings me something, and I am not to the end yet.

"We are all at the mercy of our own imaginations."

Could it be that the thoughts I was driving from time to time in her direction were making me see the girl with deeper charm each hour? Is it this way that we feed our own pictures—bind ourselves to them, thought by thought?

And is it in reality ourselves that we love after all—that which we send out from ourselves in love to another, returning to us again in invincible attraction? Is this the meaning of glamour? All this sort of staggers me as I put it down. It is too deep now for me, as it was then. Take it or not as you like.

Anyway it didn't slow up my outpouring to Chireen Holt that moment—nor afterward. I gambled and plunged after making the first few plays. I would do it all again. It's the biggest game of all. . . . Only not that night. She was close in the great stillness. There was something intimate about her face, like the picture a man finds of his mother as a girl. That tells it rather well. She was stealing into my heart all right, and my hands were lifted to take her, but just then I had grace enough to remember her father—and we turned back together. . . .

19

I GO WITH CHIREEN TO THE BUNK-HOUSE IN THE NIGHT AND PERCEIVE OUR INFANTRY STUNNED WITH BLACK SMOKE

WORD had come from Catten in the evening that all was well down in the harbour, no firing since noon, nor need of further hands. No natives had appeared in the compound after we succeeded in getting the gates shut, and there was no chance for them to live long in the open around there, with all the castle ports so easily manned. Lance was utterly exhausted, and had tumbled asleep at the supper table. Shiela, bled grey, whimpered softly in the sleep of exhaustion. Magda roamed like a big night animal, around the court and castle walls, and I waited in different places—making appearance of heavy thought and cark of responsibility—in reality hoping for Chireen

Holt to join me out of pure accident. . . . These things happen.

I was just crossing the grounds for a look at the bunk-house of the Chinese when she came and walked with me. Catten had his thirty-five men down in the harbour; fifteen were on sentry-work in the court and castle, but the rest were off duty back in the bunk-house, an unreasonable division of force, with the possibility of being cut off from the castle by an over-wall raid, except, of course, for the underground passage connecting the castle with the Chinese quarters.

We had crossed the compound and were out in the silent jungle at the blue lagoon, the farthest point of the grounds. The night was absolutely still and heavy. The long grey-green moss hung motionless. More intensely, I believe, than at any other time in recent months it bore down upon me how little and far we were down here on our toy island, floating like a blue gentian flower adrift in the Pacific. Enough things had happened in the past few hours to have me completely out of myself, so that now a Jack Bowditch in a dream

seemed to be watching the other doing falteringly the thing at hand.

The air was thick and sticky and opppressive as we approached the bunk-house—a huge concrete affair with barred windows like the castle, and a heavy iron door. There seemed always a purple mist here at night. Twisted buttressed trunks arched over the path, their tops an intricate weave of creepers and vegetable snakes; clusters of pandanus plant perched on sprawling stilt-like legs, were like giant watching spiders. Over all was the sickish sweet odour of a nameless night-blooming orchid that hung in pallid clusters of pinkish-purple from the trees—flowers so perfect and luxurious as to be disgusting, like the hand of the Yellow Lord. The whole feel of the night air down by this region was so still and death-like that something in the pit of my chest sent out a warning to retreat. Chireen didn't miss my tremors.

Lamps were low-turned in the bunk-house. We were admitted by The Crane, head time-keeper of the plantation. White foremen and overseers might come and go; coolies were beaten, killed or freed, but The Crane remained

a fixture, a sort of extension of Hoy Mon's consciousness beaten thin. Catten it was who had given The Crane his name from the latter's habit of standing motionless on one leg for interminable periods of time like a gaunt waterbird, the flat of one foot cushioned against the inner surface of his opposite thigh. How he held his equilibrium was a mystery to all of us. We laid it to his feet, which were huge and splayed; also to the comparative emaciation of the rest of his body. The Crane was utterly imperturbable, and the colour of old ivory. His eyes, behind huge horn-rimmed spectacles, had a sort of film over them. I have never seen a living creature worn so thin.

The murmuring which one might take to be the night wind came really from within—sighs and low intonings from human lips, sounds that came from neither in nor out of the realm of sleep. In a backward flash I recalled once before when I had heard some like this—when I had spent a single night on the stone floor of a jail in Port Said, in company with some of the darkest float of three continents.

We stood presently in the centre of the place, in the light of several low-turned lanterns.

Over a hundred and fifty Chinese were in these quarters, many having over-flowed to the earthen floor from the triple tier of bunks. The eyes of those still smoking turned upon us, dead, incurious, yet glowing with dull fever, like the stare of patients suffering from acute spinal disease. Some lifted their heads for an instant from floor or bunks—those who had evidently been tending the three little stone fire-holes built in the floor for the cooking of the pellets.

For a couple of minutes we stood, turning slowly about, returning stare for stare that death's-head circle. The bodies looked more ravaged than by day—legs of bone stretched over with parchment dangled over the sides of bunks. The skin seemed tight and shiny over yellow skulls and cheek-bones. Resting on their chests, or hanging listlessly from bony fingers, were the opium pipes. In the centre were the rifles in rickety stacks.

We were back in the jungle path again.

"But how do they get the stuff, Chireen? It's costly these days. It takes a lot of manual

labour to afford to smoke opium all night. Catten never speaks of these things."

She shuddered.

"They get so they don't want much else," she whispered. "All that hasn't to do with black smoke sinks into nothing presently in their minds. So long as they last, they keep up the field-work days. They say it's worth a day of hell—a night of heaven like this. How terrible to teach them so! I think a curse will come to our little island—just for this."

"Is it Tsui Tsing's way?" I asked.

"Not his fault. I'm not supposed to speak of these things, but there's a big system behind him, exploiting native labour, getting all their savings, making the poor wrecks live for the black smoke."

"You mean the foreign-end of the trading company over on the Continent?"

"Yes, here and on all the plantations, though it is heresy to speak of it. . . . The Chinese come to labour. They start in with the idea of saving for a fortune to live and die on back in China, but they forget this dream. Some of them have been here three or four years, but the Yellow Lord doesn't keep them long after they

get weak in the field work. Sunlight makes them softly insane after a while."

"The point is, that supplying them with opium sort of simplifies all the other wants?" I asked.

"That's all there is to it. They don't draw much pay after a few months; they take it all out in pipe-fulls—stay on in slavery."

We had talked lightly and steadily in lowered tones as we approached the castle. The thing was hard to shake off, a kind of persistent ferocity about it all—the Yellow Lord trafficking in souls, holding back the wages, opium in plenty, dealing out the cheapest kind of rice and tea and dried fish, using up scores of human beings every year, bringing them in fresh under promises—advertisement possibly in the *North China News*—and a big system of white men back of the Yellow Lord, whose yoke lay upon these lotus eaters, enduring the agonies of the damned ten hours a day under a tropic sun for freedom in their little hell-bordered paradise at night. . . . I was thinking of the rifles in the rickety stacks. . . . The guards let us into the court again, and Chireen, with a swift

pressure of the hand, hurried toward the light of her quarters.

I heard a sentry challenge—a Chinese squeak it was, not a little humorous, and Catten's answer outside. I was at the gate almost as it opened, but Magda was there before me. This was not two minutes after I had left Chireen. Yet I saw the latter's door, which had been slightly ajar, closed softly from within, as Catten's voice outside became recognisable. Her feeling was like a shadow between me and the Englishman. Whether I liked it or not, Chireen pulled me in one direction, Catten another. It did me no good to be angry with myself about it.

He was many minutes with Magda and then joined me, bringing in something of the different pressure of the harbour water-levels—something of thirst and laughter and dry nervous needs and deviltry done brown. It was as if the afternoon with Chireen had given me a fresher eye for the problem of Catten—the man being a problem, the woman a mystery; yet, as we stood together drinking a *Sequestered Isle*, I saw how easy it was to fall for the grace and charm of this brigand.

". . . But, Catten," I said, after we had talked a few minutes, "what will he do next?"

I referred to Comitu. Catten lit a cigarette and remarked that the harbour was as still as a glue-pot. He remarked in addition that what was good about our life up here in the castle was that we could hear the night-birds occasionally.

"The naval-end is all right when one gets service out in the white water," he added.

"But, Catten," I persisted, "he had the worst possible getaway, even falling down with Mrs. Comitu; his artillery doesn't seem to carry across the harbour; you outgeneralled him completely this morning in his manœuvre to get the *Virgin*, and thanks to Lance and Shiela and Miss Holt again, we managed to get back to the castle after a lively run and mix-up on our way—only eight or ten of our Chino's hurt."

Catten sipped and regarded me over the candles—the old baleful, tantalising humour.

"So you think it's about all over, do you?" he inquired.

"Well, I'm interested to get your opinion. I don't see how the Islanders can get aboard the *Virgin* unless they crawled up anchor-chains,

which is one by one business—leisurely bull's-eyes presented, and, as you say, the *Jezebel* is sheltered by the steamer and can be put off dock at a moment's notice."

"And what does Miss Holt think of all this?" he asked.

I caught the irony in his repetition of *Miss*. I had not used it before, not from the first day. It had sounded stiff and petty—I could see as much now. Apparently I wasn't big enough to play the game bravely and right between a man and a woman. . . . Catten's hand brushed mine. He may have felt my tension; in any case he tried bravely to cover the strain.

"I'm going to mix you one of these," he said, drawing the materials together under the drop light—". . . and you, Canton Ginger," he added to the barboy,—"you watch me. You can't multiply *Sequestered Islands* by mechanical means; you've got to use your genius, your dæmon, your angel. . . . Have you noted that a Chinese always wants to repeat, Bowditch? You can't repeat on a fine thing. A drink like this is a function—a ceremony. Its innate wonder lies in its spontaniety. . . . You'll like this one better, my friend."

. . . There had been no real chance to tell Catten all the points of my little excursion with Jerry Comitu. He was asking questions about it now, but more as one who had charge of affairs and might get some additional light than in the friendly manner of a day or two ago. I had reached in swift narrative the point of our little cruise out toward the portal when Catten said:

"Old Jerry didn't mean to kill you——"

"Think not?"

"No. He wanted you with him a whole lot; that's evident, but the pike pole was spontaneous, so to say——"

"What do you think he meant to do with me in case I didn't fall in with his plans?"

"Didn't you say that Jerry and Jim Hassey leaped from the *banco* to the portal ledge?"

"Yes."

"Rather clear that the *banco* was to take you to some other island or some hiding-place on this. Old Jerry would use you as a hostage or he would deport you for the present, but he would have to get mad to kill. . . . He rather hates to kill a man, having tried it. Jerry wouldn't even kill a Chinaman——"

"A lot of white men along these shores have undertaken to relax themselves killing off Chinamen," I said dubiously, "but I've always seen them come to bad ends shortly. The Mother Empire doesn't approve. She likes to do her own killing."

"It was your trying to climb on the ledge with him that got the action," Catten added thoughtfully. "Jerry let himself flare up right then——"

"I had a vague idea of being deported when I tried the ledge," I added.

Catten was thinking of something else.

"As a matter of fact, Jerry was spoiled long ago for being a pirate," he mused. "It wasn't a Chinaman he killed, but a white man somewhere. The white man had what they call 'the etheric double.' It isn't exactly disease, but anyway he came back and sat on Jerry's bunk from time to time—wanting to talk it over, not knowing he was dead."

"Ah," said I, recalling Jerry's mysterious remark as he lunged the pike—about being forced to "get" me, and my coming back and torturing him afterward.

"He really wanted a side-kicker on the treasure-hunt," Catten capitulated, after a pause.

"I thought he had put it up to you," I said. "And yet I wondered how you could stay friendly, if he had."

Catten laughed.

"He didn't take me out to Labulamo to tell his story. I wouldn't have let you go if I thought he was really dangerous. He intimated the treasure stuff, and let me get close, but he didn't talk of the *Jezebel* or throwing over his post here. The *Jezebel* idea may have come since. Yes, the whole plan has been growing on him since he talked with me."

"He was afraid of you beating him to it," I replied.

Catten seemed much pleased at this, and that Comitu should fear for diving-equipment on board the *Jezebel.*

"Jerry's doors don't open and shut just right," he said presently. "He gets brooding in a thought, and then it takes him and he loses his way. Same old treasure stuff—just a thought-form, Bowditch. Gets more and more likely and possible up the years, to the mind that harbours it. . . . So it's the *Jezebel* he

wants. Perhaps that's the main idea of the war."

Catten looked at me queerly as if to say something further, but decided not to. He brushed my hand lightly and left quarters. . . . I supposed he had gone back to the harbour at once, but a few minutes afterward, crossing the court, I heard his voice from the dense palm shadow. It was the voice of the old Catten I knew at his worst—a laughing, bantering voice, even something of patronage in the tone. For a moment there was silence, then a sob from Magda. . . . Later I wondered why he came up from the harbour. It might have been to see Magda, but I was more inclined to think that he had risked leaving the *Jezebel* for an hour or so rather than take his night-cap alone. I was sorry for the strangeness that had come between us, and felt that Catten wouldn't take another climb merely to join me in a *Sequestered Isle.*

20

THE CHAPTER OF AN OMINOUS LULL IN WHICH SEVERAL SMALL THINGS ARE SET FORTH

THE next day was also quiet, at least until toward the end. No Islanders appeared within or near the wall. I was occupied at the bunk-house most of the day, working with the Chinese there, endeavouring to organise them into some sort of defensive unit. I put all I had in them, but it wasn't a full-hearted effort or answer. At least, I saw that they were clean and well-fed that day; a strange and sombre experience, like working with the sailors of a phantom ship. They didn't seem sure that there was a war on and I didn't blame them much, for the crowd of events had lifted me a little out of time and space.

I had to stop and rearrange often in my mind matters of where and why and how long. At

regular intervals the murder of the little Chinese tea-picker, his throat cut by the curved knife from behind, recurred to my mind with a crawling chill—a deeper impression, according to the perspective, even than Jerry Comitu's attempt on my life. I paused to reflect that Major Holt was gone. His last days had been quieter and quieter, and his passing but a shadow, as if the bustling vitality of the man had taken its departure from the castle before the death wound. I think Comitu was more in evidence, at least, in our thoughts than he had been when leading his life in our midst.

I don't quite understand it yet—how my heart refused to hate the big fellow, even in those days immediately after his throwing us over. Catten was a good hater in his quiet way, but he didn't hold any serious personal hostility. I was inclined to think that Jerry had done his worst for us already. The *Virgin* and the *Jezebel* looked to me rather well out of his reach. The bunk-house was stoutly protected by its own structure and the Wall. I had found that the Chinese firing from protected points within were altogether different soldiers than when asked to manœuvre in the open. The

castle looked to me utterly untakable from Jerry's standpoint, for he could not live to emplace his little brass pieces within the wall; no surrounding hill commanded our headquarters; nor could he expect to take such a position with mere men and a few unreliable rifles. The fact is, I couldn't imagine him getting closer to a real winning than he had on the first over-wall raid, when he had us wide-open and distracted by the counter-firing down in the harbour. If he had been in the compound instead of personally conducting the altercation with Hemiter, he would have succeeded in forcing the Gates that morning, and flooding his Islanders into our court for a clean-up. . . . Still, it is worth mentioning that Catten always smiled dangerously when I spoke of the war being over.

Hoy Mon made a sally under convoy this day to the harbour level and had a conference with three foreign members of the Tsui Tsing Trading Company who had come over on the *Virgin*.. They had thought it unwise to step ashore upon discovering our island in a state of "shameful insurrection" from the natives. . . . I had not yet seen these callers, but drew

from what Catten had said that they were frock-coated empire-builders of the trade ideal; that they were exceedingly irate that such lawlessness as these Islanders showed could possibly exist in these late days among the isles of the sea. They recommended that we deal with Labulamo without mercy—make an example of him, in fact; and as for Comitu, he should of course he given the remedial rope when taken alive; not the rope's end merely, but the rope's loop afterward.

Captain Hemiter suffered a reaction for several hours after his boat was boarded by Catten's Chinese. In fact, he did not appear in the hot saloon of the *Virgin* until late that night. Grey and haggard he was, it was said, and his beard looked plucked at. He tried to place the blame upon all creatures without finding ease, and vowed that if he ever got himself and his ship out of the reptilian throat of this harbour, he would never steer it in again. I thought of Dory Beagle of the *Lagnon*.

Chireen and I had a few minutes under the banyan tree at sunset. We spoke of Hoy Mon who returned from the harbour, stricken white like one who has failed in a life work.

"I do not understand him, and I know that he hates women," Chireen said, "but somehow I feel more faith in his honour than in others—even in the white men."

I had learned to listen carefully to her intuitions.

"But why does he permit such a condition in the bunk-house?" I asked.

"I noticed him once before like this—ill after a discussion with foreign members of the firm," she continued. "I think the opium traffic is against the old order of the Trading Company. More and more I think of Hoy Mon as merely a retainer of the Yellow Lord——"

"But all orders come from him?"

"It does seem so, but perhaps the orders so far have not gone against what others thought best——"

"Others?"

She was silent.

"You saw Hoy Mon give over command to Catten," I reminded.

"Yes——"

I looked at her hand, and lost the thread of the talk. It was near me, and restful—a little browned from the sun, a very ready and grace-

ful hand. My own were in evidence as usual, but they became suddenly black and big and bony, so that I put them out of sight. . . . Chireen was still thinking. The hand lifted from her lap near me and touched my sleeve.

"You don't belong here, Jack Bowditch," she said.

"I'm afraid I do—I'm afraid it wouldn't have called to me in Shanghai, if I hadn't belonged."

"But you don't now," she said quietly. "All that is finished."

"Oh, yes," I said. "I belong here more than ever."

I was breathless. I saw her wrist so near, and the little trailing white thing at her elbow. I would have sworn that no other woman ever had such magic. It seemed I might touch her hand, in fact one of mine came forth . . . but just then I thought of Jim Hassey and I saw the trigger-finger. . . . You'll laugh, but it shut me up again.

"More than ever?" she repeated.

"Since you and Lance are here," I gasped.

"He loves you," she went on so easily. "I always wanted a real man for him to know."

I saw her as mother and daughter and sister in that house—Chireen "which is Persian for *sweet*"; and then I asked her directly and suddenly if she had not suggested to Lance that he give me the little pistol when I went away with Jerry Comitu—the pistol that had enabled me to get back. . . . Chireen laughed and ran back to the big gate, saying it was past supper hour. . . . I walked down to the pepper-grove, thinking, thinking about the clear, bracing character of her. It was like northern pines and spring waters to me—that refreshing glimpse of purity that forms in a kind of dream in the heart of a man who is held long in the tropics —the diamond heart of her, flawless and masterfully cut, having passed through many tests and pressures, all frosts and flames and refinements, finished in clarity and intrinsic radiation. . . .

I wanted to go back to her at once, to tell her something more, but patience came to me from the deep joy of recent revelations. This was one high, great night to me. The moist breath of the pepper trees, the dew upon the grass, the warm, tonic air from the slopes, charged all day with burning light, the far soft

singing of the surf, so gentle and desultory, a quarter waxing moon half-way down the slope toward the portal, its light on the great creamy pillars, its path across the magic purple of the little harbour—the great breath of the life and the future beyond that portal, the open, uncharted seas—days ahead for any heroisms, all life a game, a rousing play, the Comrade found—days with her. That was one of the high minutes of life. . . .

I heard her playing from the barred windows of the music-room as I returned to the castle.

That night late, as on the night before, Catten came again. We stood in the same place and were served by the same *boy* whom he called *Canton Ginger*. He said that Jerry had not made a single move down in the harbour all day. I had a similar report.

"How are they all out in the bunk-house?" Catten asked.

I had made a call there with Chireen earlier in the evening, exactly as on the night before, and had found things much the same, under the sleepless eyes of The Crane.

"Good old One-foot on duty with pad and pencil," I answered. "By the way, Catten, if

Comitu only had some way of stopping our opium supply, wouldn't he have our little army of defenders somewhat like a house divided against itself?"

"De-polarised?" he finished.

"Exactly. Who runs that end of the Commissary?" I asked.

Catten left me without answering—as I supposed for the night. I heard him pass out of the gate, and saw Chireen's door open partly again. After some moments, the sentry-gate swung for him once more, and I heard him ask the Chinese on duty there if Magda were in or out. I did not hear the reply. In any case, Catten rejoined me.

"Tell me, how's Captain Hemiter?" I inquired.

He drew up a chair with his foot and another for me. By the look in my friend's eye and the tension around his thin lips, I knew he had something further to say that required time and space—something that never was told.

21

IN WHICH CATTEN GOES DOWN AND CHIREEN IS MYSTERIOUSLY MISSING IN THE GREAT BLACKNESS

THE next instant Catten went out like a shadow-man before my eyes—floors rolled up and ceilings bent, all senses outraged, all movements crippled, all lights of the castle out. . . . Then I heard a voice as of one dying, a sort of cackle in it—from Catten:

"Comitu — doesn't—look—quite—whipped —yet!"

Certain young gentlemen of military training might have thought of what they had come to Magdalena for in a moment like this, but I thought of Chireen Holt, though no marriage dependencies had intervened. . . . Our quarters were black, unbreathable, full of smoke and rock-dust. I heard no more from Catten

just then. I sprawled dismally, on the way to the door leading into the court. It was bent like a milliner's box, and wedged in a true stone and steel grip from a sagging lintel. On the way back to the window I remember climbing nervously over the prone buffet which had caused my fall a moment ago; also I remember the mean sweetish odour of mixed drinks that came to me—gin, rum and bourbon sending up their sharp individual vapours that held war with one another to the death, even limes unable to mollify . . . broken glass stabbing up from the floor.

I now saw a square of blue at the window, and faintly the stars shone. I heard a woman's voice, like a scream—madness in it, as of one standing before an apparition. There was a tread and roar somehow coming from below. It was strangely, laughably like the mob voices one used to hear from behind the scenes in the days of melodrama before the films. The square of blue-black starlight and the silver lustre of the outer night brought a waver of hope. The stars held steady in this sinking ship of a world.

The sash had fallen somehow, letting the

glass and steel screening down to the sill. I tried to lift this, but there wasn't even an answering vibration until I leaned a heavily wadded shoulder against it. Then I unfastened the steel grating which only was possible to move from within. Many written words, but not more than sixty seconds had elapsed since the explosion, though Catten had been silent and out of my consciousness absolutely in the interval. I went back to the centre of the room, to the edge of the fallen buffet, calling his name. I heard a chuckle and the ring of broken glass under his boot, but the voice was from the floor.

"The fact is, Bowditch, we ought to get out of here——"

"Come, give me your hand. . . . Come to the window!"

I was horribly anxious for haste, but something in his voice held me there, groping for his hand in the blackness beside the fallen buffet. Hot and wet the hand I touched at last; Catten was mumbling apologetically for his clumsiness. God forgive me, but a hell of hatred was in my heart for his keeping me from Chireen Holt. He may have sensed something of the

sort, or it may have been just his command of himself that made him say, as I lifted him over:

"Don't mind me, Bowditch, if you're in a hurry."

And then a second later:

"Set me down, old man. I'll get my bearings in a minute or two. . . . Absurd of me to be uncoupled this way. Spine let down, and all that——"

I was getting him through the window that opened into the compound. The first thoughts really of what had happened, the meaning of the explosion and the sounds now from below were drumming into the foreground of consciousness with the agony to get to Chireen's part of the house. These and other thoughts, as my eyes grew accustomed to the starlight. . . . In such moments, an altogether different dimension of mental productivity opens. I tell you as a sort of curiosity that I had no sooner stepped upon the level cement of the compound with Catten in my arms, than the whole picture of yesterday morning's mêlée returned to mind—*her* father hurrying forth to meet us, leaving the court because Lance and Chireen were in danger, his hands stretched out,

and the calm smile and pallor of his face as he sank. . . . And all this time Chireen's position and condition were unknown to me; and all this time the world I had built so toughly, if tentatively, about Catten was binding me to him for life or death. It was now that I heard the familiar rumble from Shiela's breast and knew that we were near their window.

"Chireen! Chireen!" I called.

Lance's voice was cold and slow.

"I'm glad you spoke, Mr. Bowditch; I heard steps. I was just about to fire."

"On the dot as usual," I managed to reply. "Are you all right?"

"I don't know. Only Shiela and I are here."

"Where's Chireen?"

"I don't know. She went out a few minutes before the explosion. I can't force the court door open."

"Unfasten the barred gratings here, if you can," I said hastily. ". . . Good. Now take Mr. Catten; he's hurt. Take care of him and stay where you are for the present. . . . I'll climb over into the court somehow."

I was looking through a kind of cold grey haze; even the thoughts in my mind moved in

the chill fog. Catten resisted laughingly, but I shoved him through the window. I heard Lance's steady voice:

"Just as you say, Mr. Bowditch. . . . They've managed to get to the powder magazine from below."

Of course, something of this sort had happened, but it had not yet come into my mind to the point of words like this. I want to make this situation clear. The doors of all the rooms of the castle opened into each other or to the court within. There were no outer modes of egress except the main gates to the north or south and the sentry doors set within them. The big powder magazine, as I understood it, was immediately below the rooms Jerry Comitu had occupied. Chireen's section was to the north of that, and the room which Catten and I had used was south on the same side. The windows of all the apartments, opening to the outer side of the building on the compound, were barred as said, and could only be unfastened from within. Lance had succeeded in opening the bars for me to pass Catten in, but he could not move on into the court because his door was jammed like ours by the explosion.

I wanted above all things to reach the court, where I hoped to find Chireen.

Of the sentries we had posted around the outer windows on the compound, not one was in sight, and I had already traversed the full length of the castle on the eastern side. I thought of the sentry-door within the great gate to the north, and started there. Ordinarily the Chinese guards on duty could not have reached the shelter of the court unless this inner door itself had been opened. I didn't get that far, however. Repassing that part of the castle which the Comitus had occupied, eyes more and more adjusted to the starlight, I saw now that the whole structure was sagging and shapeless at this point. The sentries might have scrambled over here.

A moment later I was hanging from one of the big crocks of the eaves, like a boy scaling a high fence. The roof was hot and smoking. There was a crater from the explosion, that one was in danger of falling into, and fire visible beneath the broken floor, though the building as a whole was fire proof. I halted a second on the inner side of the roof before dropping down into the court; in fact, I clung there

with my body half over, listening to a new complication. Brisk firing had begun back at the jungle-end of the compound—an attack upon the bunk-house apparently. A chill struck me at the thought of the doped and helpless crew there, none knowing this situation better than Comitu, who had doubtless ordered this attack in the dead of the night when the dope-canes had our army at its worst. I thought of The Crane and the rickety rifle stacks, the tunnel filling with Islanders instead of the Yellow Lord's Chinese. . . . I was in the court now, calling from door to door, searching for Chireen.

The Chinese sentries had not climbed over the ruins as I had done. Some one had let them in the smaller door of the south gate. They were huddled together in the centre of the court, the instinct to get into the shelter in spite of fire and explosion, quite as a horse runs to a burning barn. I asked the nearest if he had seen Miss Holt, and was answered in many words and tones, but without meaning. The tension of my mind was too intense for listening sanely.

I wondered that Hoy Mon did not appear,

as I divided the shivering outfit into two parties, placing one at the inner side of the ruins, where an attacking party might possibly scale the low roof. Meanwhile I had knocked at Chireen's door again. Shiela's rumble answered and the boy's voice:

"She hasn't come back! . . . Mr. Catten has fainted. He seems terribly hurt. . . . What was the firing?"

"It's back in the direction of the bunk-house." Further words were stopped by the screaming again. It came from the direction of the Anteroom. Hoy Mon rushed by, halted at seeing me, and caught my arm.

"Come with me, Mr. Bowditch."

His face was grey. In the dark I knew this —a grey, hideous lustre, anxiety subtle and intensified. The chaos of it all came to me fiercely from Hoy Mon's face . . . the woman's voice fainter. This last had nothing to do with Chireen Holt. There had never been an instant of that fear. The door of the Anteroom was open, but all was dark within like the rest—only the star-sheen in the court.

"Our Master—our Master is ill, Mr. Bow-

ditch. . . . Perhaps you can help me. . . . Miss Magda—Miss Magda——"

They were in the dark. All was strain and low fury. I heard her gasp, half-stifled, for help:

"Guthrie! Guthrie!"

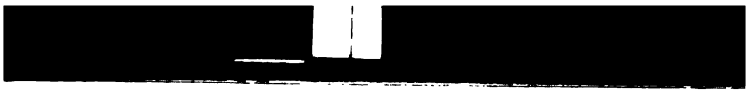
For long it seemed I had forgotten Catten's first name.

The Yellow Lord was in the dark. He seemed on his knees. I felt his bare shoulder, wet as with oil. His hand was outstretched and I followed the naked arm down to the clenched fingers in which was crushed a woman's hand. I knew by the rings she wore. Hooking my right elbow under his armpit, I twisted him back. At the first clutch and pressure of my hands his outcries began—the Yellow Lord who had no tongue in our first encounter. I knew his horror now was a reflex from the solar plexus blow. Insanity and shock expressed in his high-pitched screaming almost made me let go again, loosing strange havoc in my heart . . . this and Hoy Mon's reiterated cry in my ears not to hurt Tsui Tsing.

His body was hot and huge beneath me. I was sick from the touch of him as on the first

day—the lardy softness, the blend of Magda Comitu's perfume with this dossied horror of Oriental grooming. He had lost all thought of hurting me, save through a bear-like crushing movement, more of his shoulders and upper arms than with his hands and fingers. Once I was pulled into his reeking breast until the sick taint of his mouth left an ineffaceable memory, but a drive of my knuckles into his throat released me. The thing was floored and shaking for an instant—a mewing whimper in the air, but the minute I let go my hands the struggle was on again. I wanted to hurt him now. The odour of his mouth infuriated me. Once known it became a part of everything. . . . I heard a crashing out in the court. . . . Even in the struggle I thought of Chireen Holt and the God or devil that kept me from her.

I called to Magda to pull back, but she gasped that the beast still held her ankle. I heard her begging that no light be brought. It cannot all be told in order. There was no order in that world. Hoy Mon's face was reaching down toward the writhing features of the Yellow Lord; Hoy Mon was talking in Chinese—a hissing voice, something the same



that they frighten the big snakes with. He was struggling to penetrate the intelligence of his master. . . . Just then I heard the scratch of a match behind me—its flare and Magda's cry. In the flash I saw her huddling back against the wall, her clothing torn. Then there was a crash at my ear . . . and under my very hands the Yellow Lord moaned, his shaking different—a drowsing, moaning sound from his throat, almost human, then twitches and silence. . . . Another silence, and the quiet question, as one would ask about the result of a chemical experiment:

"Did I get him?"

It was Catten, sitting on the floor, his body propped against the frame of the door, a gun in his hand—all this in the light of his own single match—even the laugh on his face and the glint in his hard eyes.

"If you mean the Yellow Lord—you sure did," I answered.

Then as the match died out, I saw Catten's head bob forward.

22

IN WHICH I SEEK HOY MON IN THE ANTEROOM AND HELP TO MOVE THE BODY OF THE YELLOW LORD

I REMEMBER the look of horror on Hoy Mon's face after a candle was lit and he perceived that the body upon the floor was no longer tortured with life. Magda had disappeared. Catten's eyes were shut. I still heard the steady firing from the direction of the bunk-house, and wondered why The Crane had not abandoned that position and sought the tunnel to join us in the court. All this in ten seconds, after light was struck. I was getting a better sense of Comitu's generalship. I had not played enough draw poker with old Jerry. Lance appeared at the door of the anteroom a second time. He shook his head at my questioning glance, understanding that I was inquiring for Chireen.

"How did you get out?" I ask quickly, as I bent over Catten.

"Mr. Catten told me where to strike to get the door open. We heard the screaming. I pried with part of a chair."

Magda had come to the door now. She pushed me aside, and took Catten in her arms—something he might not have permitted before me, had he been conscious. . . . I left them, with only one thought, in spite of the firing, in spite of all that the Tsui Tsing Trading Company stood for. At the sentry-door in the north gate, I remembered that I might need a key to get in again, though it was simple to slip forth. I was disinclined to climb over that hot ruin a second time. The whole desperate urge was to find Chireen. . . . I rushed back to ask the key from Hoy Mon. He was still standing in the anteroom of the Yellow Lord's quarters—standing quite alone and motionless, as if listening at the concrete door that opened to the tunnel. He seemed old, white as a Caucasian, somehow more venerable, some new dimension of dignity and calm since the end of the Yellow Lord.

"You would not leave the court now?" he said mildly.

I was amazed at his calm.

"There is fighting in the bunk-house——"

"I am aware——"

"It would seem that our Chinese should be coming through by this time," I suggested, pointing to the tunnel.

"You would think so?"

His eyes seemed faded white at me, though they looked into my mind. A Chinese would hate a man at the mercy of fears for a woman's welfare in a moment like this. Hoy Mon took a key from under his blouse at the breast, and, pushing back his long sleeves, touched it gently to the lock of the Yellow Lord's door. I had put forth my hand, thinking that he was to accede to my request. His fingers stayed me as I began to withdraw.

"It is well for us to remain together during the rest of the night," he said.

"But if Comitu should secure the *Jezebel* he can command the *Virgin*," I remarked.

Hoy Mon drew a bit of lace from his sleeve and wiped his brow.

"A life work—a life of one-pointed atten-

tion to an object, lost in a night, Mr. Bowditch," he said strangely. "It is well I have years. It is well to be full of years when one fails. Young minds cannot have the philosophic calm——"

I raised my hand against further words. He could not miss the red of rage in my eyes. He drew the door to the Yellow Lord's quarters almost shut, not clicking the lock, however. Slipping his arm through mine, he said:

"The first matter to attend is the body of our master——"

I must have twisted impatiently.

"Ah, you have not reverence," he said kindly.

I had sense enough to hold my tongue. Perhaps you will know something of Hoy Mon's power or my own weakness when I tell you I helped him carry the still-hot hideous bulk into the place of a thousand treasures. Hoy Mon came forth with me, and stood again as I had found him at the door of the tunnel. Again I started to leave, but he raised his hand for me to stay. Swinging back the heavy door, he bade me listen. It was like a faint phonographic record of a hand-to-hand battle of many Chinese, but there were other nearer and mysteri-

ous sounds. . . . I wondered if Jerry Comitu had somehow managed to get a man through the tunnel to blow us up before making his attack on the bunk-house, but I couldn't see how he accomplished this without taking the keys from The Crane. A low tap came from the inner of the concrete doors to the tunnel, and Hoy Mon opened quickly.

The Crane himself was standing there. There was a report delivered rapidly, but I somehow got a grip of the truth that the tunnel was mined at intervals and that the points of spark ignition were controlled from this room. The Crane vanished and Hoy Mon turned to me wearily:

"What did you say, Mr. Bowditch, about one Comitu securing the *Jezebel?*"

I did not take his question seriously, but answered it as one would the whim of a superior, saying it would not have occurred to me if Mr. Catten had been in command as usual of the harbour.

Hoy Mon turned to me coldly. I was asked to repeat my words, and was astonished now to see that Hoy Mon had not realised what Catten's presence in the court might mean to the

Jezebel. The old yellow man was still calm. There was no tremour in his voice as he said to me:

"You will now, in the place of Mr. Catten, take charge of the work in the harbour, Mr. Bowditch. . . . Go to the *Jezebel* at once. You need take no men from here, since the harbour party has not been changed, and Mr. Catten doubtless left them in perfect order. You will find a Chinese first engineer, Soling Wai, who will give you information about arms on board when you show him this key."

Hoy Mon took another key from his breast and handed it to me, continuing:

"And you will give orders to the *Jezebel* to clear at once and stand out in the harbour near the *Virgin.* My mind had dismissed that thinking all well."

I turned away.

"Send a boat over to the *Virgin* and carry the apologies of the Tsui Tsing Trading Company, even from the master himself, to our foreign guests aboard."

I bowed, and this time Hoy Mon permitted me to leave the Anteroom. . . .

"Sit tight, Lance," I called, passing his door.

The boy came forth.

"Did your sister——?"

He shook his head.

"How's Mr. Catten?"

"He has fainted again. He cannot gain his feet."

Hoy Mon had followed to let me out the sentry gate. . . . A moment later I was in the compound alone—never so alone. I can't tell why I looked at my watch that moment, holding it up in the starlight. It was only five minutes past two. It was ticking steadily. I could hardly believe that less than fifteen minutes ago Catten and I had stood by the buffet for a night-cap.

23

ANOTHER LITTLE ONE, BUT WITH A GREAT PURPORT—THE BEGINNING OF A NEW TALE

THE harbour situation was no doubt imperative, I thought, but I risked a moment to run to the banyan tree, calling:

"Chireen! . . . Chireen! . . ."

She did not answer me, but some fragrance from her seemed caught among the clapping leaves. I repeated, though not loudly, lest they hear me back in the court; also there was a chance of calling in some of Comitu's islanders, in reconnoitre this side of the bunk-house. . . . No answer, only a steady increasing tension for my lingering. It was hard to remember externals in the strength and beauty of this call of my whole life to her. In man's blindness and limitation, woman's attraction at first seems to make everything right—even the neg-

lect of all others—still the effect of Catten's fortitude was queerly upon me. I was running toward the cliff ledge. It came to me now that I only deserved to find Chireen by helping some one else. Recent pictures were still turning over and over in mind—the darkness that followed the explosion in our quarters, Catten's voice from the floor, his arousing at Magda's voice, his directing Lance how to break out into the court. . . . I seemed, as I ran, to see him telling the boy where to strike the door—see him crossing the court resting on his hip. I saw his face again as after the shot, the cold glitter of the indomitable self-command of it—body leaning against the door-frame, and the fold of the woman's arms about him. Then I remembered that he had come up to the castle for one more drink with me. Could it be that the man deep within was dying to be a real comrade? . . . I had almost reached the edge of the cliff when the final shock of the night came up to me —the sound of firing down in the harbour!

By the flashes from the water, as well as from the hills, I saw that Comitu had crossed some of his men in *bancos*. He had numbers of Island-

ers closed about the craft, both from the dock and below, and still the *Jezebel* did not clear. Treachery somewhere. The cause of it all came leisurely to my mind—Catten's dislike of drinking alone. There was little resistance to the boarding. I saw the red rim of rifle-fire narrow like a lariat; then silencing of bayonets as the brigantine was boarded. It was in this silence I recognised the voice of the commander, Comitu himself. He, like Catten, had preferred the "naval end," though his land forces appeared to be operating simultaneously with success. . . . Too late I saw the *Jezebel* slipped forth now.

The *Virgin* changed hands automatically by this capture of the smaller craft by the Islanders, since the *Jezebel's* guns commanded the liner. I laughed bitterly to see how perfectly the system of the Tsui Tsing Trading Company had brought about its own destruction—even against the coolness and brilliant management of a man like Catten. Meanwhile, I was running back through the darkness with bad news indeed for Hoy Mon.

The fighting at the bunk-house was over; at least, I heard the sounds no longer. . . . I was

running now through the pepper trees across the compound—not to the north sentry gate first, as Hoy Mon had commanded. At the turn to the north side of the wall, I saw a figure there near the gate—something light about it, visible to me because of its own light in the grey starlight, rather than because of its shadow. It moved from the gate. I heard the voice. I saw it coming, arms out—the voice like one in ecstasy of answered prayer—low tones too intimate for words, as the meaning of the face I had seen that afternoon. I never knew adequately the sweetness of life before that moment—Chireen finding me after many fears.

"You have come—" she panted.

"They are firing down in the harbour," I said absurdly.

"You have come! You are not dead——"

"They have taken the *Jezebel!* Oh, where—Chireen, I could not think of anything—with you gone—where did you go?"

She had not answered. She seemed to be thinking ahead of me. When my arms lifted to take her she was apart; when I thought of anything else for a second, she was nearer. She

seemed to be laughing and crying at the same time—all pairs of opposites at once. She seemed to care for everything but me, when I bent, and only for me when I lifted my head to explain some remote complication at the castle. All the time my dazzled mind could hold to nothing steadily, and my heart was pulled to hers as to paradise; all the time we were getting farther from the North Gate, and I seemed to have been pursuing for ages, until, out of the enchantment, I heard my own voice, as in the climax of a great struggle:

"My God, I've got to have you, Chireen!"

And then I only knew she was still as a crushed flower against my breast—and as fragrant. There is only one such moment when a man's woman gives her soul to him—and he can't tell it from his own. All the war world was forgotten and asleep just then, but all stars and winds and fragrances flowed through and between us. . . . Sometimes she was drawing me back toward the gate; sometimes it was I. . . . The heavens had opened for us, and we could not long remember the disarray of earth. . . . I tapped at last at the gate, hoping they would not hear.



The door within the door opened, and Hoy Mon stood there, perceiving the end upon my face, though another might have seen the beginning. . . . Chireen and I entered together.

24

IN WHICH CATTEN APPROACHES A BIT NEARER INTO THE LIGHT, AND ASKS ABOUT THE HIGHER HAND

WITH a word and a touch of the hand I made her know that I would join her as soon as I was free, and Chireen hurried on to her quarters. Carrying bad news to Hoy Mon was not high work, but all the chaos and demolition of that night could not utterly quell the song that had started for me deep within. . . . Hoy Mon seemed to know no emotions that did not concern the Yellow Lord. He took the night's reverse calmly, nor attempted to lay blame upon any one. Presently he assumed an attitude of listening as we stood before the door of the tunnel. His slim long-nailed fingers appeared from his hanging sleeves, and his hands turned palms upward. It was his acceptance of fate.

The Crane had appeared again from the tunnel and was standing on one foot in the anteroom. Hoy Mon pulled back slightly the heavy door to the tunnel, saying wearily to the timekeeper:

"You may bring in the main body of our Chinese——"

The Crane bowed, without lowering his foot.

"You may leave a small portion in the bunk-house, yourself remaining with them——"

The Crane bowed.

"You may, in case of pressing attack, follow your main body to this place, leaving doors of bunk-house conveniently open."

The Crane understood, but I did not. In fact, I rubbed my eyes somewhat, even though I realised that Hoy Mon spoke English in deference to my presence. The venerable one now gave the other permission to depart. The Crane let down the missing foot, raised his long elbows like a bird preparing to fly and disappeared into the tunnel, not having smiled as yet in this life. Hoy Mon turned to me as he closed the door:

"You ask question?" he said.

"Ah,—the point of letting the Islanders into the tunnel——" I said idly.

Hoy Mon opened a small cabinet in the broad casing to the right of the door. It was only a moment that he let me see, though apparently in leisurely manner. I was informed that the tunnel was divided in sections corresponding to blocks here in the dial, and that one could tell if any large party passed through; that the tunnel was constructed so that said party, if advancing with hostile intent, might be isolated in a block.

"Did Jerry Comitu know of this block system?" I asked.

"That I am afraid," said Hoy Mon.

I did not understand how Hoy Mon could be cheerfully in doubt on such a matter, unless he had left all these affairs to Catten. The fact that he had missed the meaning of Catten's absence from the *Jezebel* in a most crucial time rather disturbed my conception of his genius as a leader.

"We should know rather soon if Jerry has the tunnel trick," I added. "Certainly he won't follow through, if he does——"

I had a mental picture for a second of three

or four hundred Islanders caught in a series of black pits—held for negotiation of terms, or possibly blown up.

Catten had been taken back to the room in Chireen's part of the house. Pain was altering him swiftly. The old bravado and glitter were gone, and I saw in the candlelight in or about his face a strange white sincerity. It was altogether new to my eyes, yet it belonged to him, too. Try to understand what I mean now. Moments of life were different; everything was different. It was a culmination—this night and morning, much farther than the choicest word-pictures can portray. There is no failure without a winning, but the opposite is also true up to a certain point.

"Hello, Bowditch," he said, and cleared his throat to cover the faintness of voice that pain and shock were responsible for. "Tell me what Hoy Mon is doing."

"He seemed to turn palms up when he heard that Comitu had taken over the *Jezebel*."

Catten tried not to let me see it, but he winced right there, and then attempted to make me believe that it was the pain of his body.

"Good old Chino—Hoy Mon," he muttered. "Good old Chino—best I ever saw. He's a mystic, Bowditch; do you know what that is?"

I said I hadn't a very clear idea, and Catten laughed.

"You're a real roughneck, Bowditch—half a woman, the best kind."

He laughed again, and added:

"You don't know anything like that, do you? You haven't got a pious streak anywhere? You wouldn't know what it meant if I told you that we are always reaching up for a Higher Hand somehow—like little Hoolie a night or two ago, when he came to our mosquito bars. . . . You don't know nothing about magnetism, do you?"

Catten had never been so endearing to me. He was giving glimpses now of some light always hidden deep before, but I didn't understand quickly enough, and his old habits of mind flicked me away from reality when he saw I was getting too intent.

"So he turned palms up—old Hoy Mon?" he resumed. "And how did he take the word that we had lost the harbour?"

"He just took it—a kind of grace I never

saw pulled off before—gave his orders to The Crane and let me go——"

"What orders, Bowditch?"

"Sent him back into the tunnel. You see, The Crane reported to him from the bunk-house underground. . . . You heard there was a surprise from the Islanders, but the effort of defence hasn't been very severe so far. It's quiet now. From the little I understood, The Crane might be induced to retreat this way, leaving the doors of the passage open, or something like that."

"Something like that," Catten repeated. "Comitu always falls for something like that."

Catten managed one of his old chuckles, but there was a faint whiteness like a feather flicked over his face, as the features writhed. My hand went out to him, but he only grasped it a second, adding:

"And Hoy Mon didn't say anything about my being in the court, instead of down in the harbour, when the worst happened?"

"No."

"You know that's where we lost the island, Bowditch. You know that's all there was to it—a whim of mine right there to take a drink

with you. . . . I'll drink alone from now on—yes."

I looked around the inner room now with the thought of refreshment. This was the least damaged end of the apartment. I went to the door to ask for a Chinese boy, and Chireen was there with Lance and Shiela; she seemed to know before I spoke.

"I will tend to it," she said. "Go back to him."

". . . What was it Hoy Mon said to The Crane—what orders?" Catten asked, when I re-entered.

"Something about letting the Islanders into the passage."

"I wonder if Jerry Comitu will fall for that? I wonder?"

"But he must have got a man through to blow us up," I said.

"Dear little bear-cat," he muttered. "I should have prevented that."

"What, Catten, what?"

"You had a hand in that, too, Bowditch. You let her out when she was under guard."

"You mean Magda?"

"I don't mean anything. I don't know my-

self. Everything is getting away, Bowditch. . . . Old Jerry Comitu knows too much to let his Islanders flood into the passage. . . . He knows the fire-pots lying in there as well as Hoy Mon. If he's got the *Jezebel*, he's got the *Virgin*, and we'll have to treat with him in the morning. God, wouldn't he have the laugh on me—old Jerry? . . . The firing on the bunkhouse was only a foil to cover his movements down in the harbour."

I was hardly hearing him now, at least the last sentence or two. Magda playing into the hands of her father! Had she merely used Catten? Did their quarrel that I had happened to overhear in part last night have anything to do with the demolished castle? Had the attack of the first night by Comitu, apparently to get Magda, been just a blind to accomplish exactly what happened—a reinstatement of Magda in our confidence? Had she been able to carry on her affair where her mother failed? . . . I thought of many things Catten had told me about Jerry Comitu's capacity for outguessing an opponent in all games of bluff.

"But how does Hoy Mon fall for all this? —tell me, Catten."

"Old Hoy Mon's a mystic," he answered in his old bantering way. "He left all these things to us. We were supposed to take care of the fighting-end."

"Official military knowledge required," I muttered.

Chireen tapped at the door. She had been unable to find a Chinese for bar service, she said, but she had brought some of the things herself. I took the tray.

"The tea-pickers are coming in from the bunk-house," she added. "Some are wounded. It will soon be day."

She was gone. My back was to Catten for a minute as I mixed a drink for two.

"It will soon be day," he repeated, and then added: "There's a white woman—first I ever met."

There wasn't the goods to put up a *Sequestered Isle*, but I mixed a stiff small brown one for him, and took mine standing at his side. . . . Catten asked for another—our last drink together. . . .

"I could have done it better all around," he

said whimsically. "After all I knew, I held old Jerry too cheap. . . . Has Magda gone?"

"I haven't seen her since the Yellow Lord——"

"She wouldn't linger much if she pulled off that explosion," Catten added. "Perhaps old Hoy Mon has got her number."

I went to the door and asked Chireen to find Magda, but Catten was shaking his head.

"I might have done better about that," he muttered, when the door was shut. "I never could play more than an hour or two with a woman. I always began to think about something else, like little Hoolie. . . . I might have occupied her mind to keep her from mischief. . . . But hell, Bowditch, it was a man-pal for me. A man for me. . . . Come here."

I leaned.

"I'm going away," he said.

"Where?"

"Down to the harbour," he smiled. "I'm going down there, but I want to tell you, Bowditch, that I fell for you. . . . You and I could have put it over together, if it hadn't been for a woman. . . . It's all right. As I say, she's a white one—a lily-fair."

I made no sound, though my lips may have moved.

"Oh, I saw it last night when I came up from the harbour—I saw it tonight. . . . I haven't been good to women, and it's quite right one of them should get back on me, but, Bowditch, there's stuff a woman can't give a man, though he leaves his friend for her. . . . I've always noticed it; a man can't play a woman and a pal, too."

I stood silent, my fingers groping a little, though my arm didn't move. . . . I felt a thick envelope in my hand which he had taken from his inner belt.

"I'm going to leave this with you—just a few things for your edification and some favours to attend. Tell old Hoy Mon that I never got past him, never grew out of him. . . . He'll understand."

"But, Catten, you're hurt—badly bruised up. You crossed the court on your knees——"

"I can make my getaway all right. . . . It's a quick sneak for me—everything still to do, everything still undone, the devil of it . . . Bowditch——"

His hand came up to mine this time, and didn't hurry.

"Bowditch," he repeated.

"Yes?"

Now he found my eyes looking deeply into his. For an instant he endured it; then the old banter came and passed. His lips began fumblingly . . . but just then, as I bent, the screaming was suddenly resumed outside—the screaming of Magda.

25

IN WHICH I HAVE SEVERAL INTERVIEWS, ENDING WITH CATTEN, WHO FINALLY DRINKS ALONE

IT was with a kind of insane exhaustion that I looked close into the faces of the two struggling figures on the broken pavement in front of that part of the castle which had been Comitu's quarters; Magda and the venerable Hoy Mon wrestling and battling together, the Chinese silent, the woman screaming. Dawn was grey upon the flags and the Chinese tea-pickers stood helplessly by the fountain. I thrust myself between them until Hoy Mon got clear. Magda went limp in my arms as if fainting:

"Thank you, Mr. Bowditch," Hoy Mon said with a hissing intake of breath like a Japanese hotel-keeper. "Thank you. Our dear Master

knew what he was doing when he grappled with the young woman before."

I laughed queerly at his ancient habit of making a god of the imbecile. The illusion of that was gone from me forever. . . . I glanced down through the grey light at the parted lips of the girl—our only hope with Jerry Comitu, it now occurred.

"What was she doing, Hoy Mon?"

"Having by myself twice been refused the key to the sentry-door, she tried to climb over the ruins just here. Her screaming began when I caught her—frock," said Hoy Mon.

"Ah," said I.

"Quite the same, I fancy, as when our master tried to detain her, though we did not understand at the time."

"No, not at the time," I said wearily.

"You may carry her to the little quarters where she was locked before," Hoy Mon resumed.

I felt a tremble through the body in my arms.

"And do not let her fall and hurt herself. It is not that she could get away, but she will be most valuable when her father comes to bring our terms."

I felt at this point the quick breath of the athletic girl. Hoy Mon now questioned me about Catten.

"He's down," said I, "all down."

I heard Magda's lips murmur, "Guthrie."

"It is well,' said Hoy Mon coldly, and a shiver went through me because I perceived that Hoy Mon saw clearly the necessity of Catten paying in full for the murder of the Yellow Lord. . . .

Now Magda's wailing began. It was mysterious as Asia, a woman wailing for her lover and her first born and her master all in one—no words—sometimes the voice so abject and full of failure as to be empty of all reason, like the cry of the pariah to the moon. The more a man learns in detached ways about a woman, the less he seems to know of her mysterious unity. Magda had forgotten all at this moment save her whim for Catten. At least it did not seem as if it could be more, since she had succeeded in blowing us up, where her mother had failed. I could not see how she could have really given herself in love to Catten and still have carried out her father's purpose, but remembering her quarrel with Catten,

I seemed to draw closer to the truth. Magda was of the type dangerous to play with as Catten had played.

At the door of the little quarters Hoy Mon drew the key from his breast and opened very carefully. The pitiful chattering of Hoolie came forth to me—the little tree-man detained there. Magda entered without resistance and sank to the floor, and I heard them mourning together after the door was shut.

Hoy Mon had not dismissed me though I was anxious to get back to Catten. We re-entered the anteroom together. The venerable one turned on a lamp at his hand, and I saw again the green tints and edgings of his garment and person, also the shine on his chin, which curiously diminished the picture. It was plain that Hoy Mon regarded nothing so impressively as the fact of the dead man in the next room. For the first he gave me a word of commendation, saying that his trust was growing rapidly—that I was the one who must make ready with him the body of Tsui Tsing for return to China.

This detail is astonishing when one considered our plight—the *Jezebel* changed hands,

Catten helpless, the castle damaged. I could think of little else than our small white remnant, and the chance of getting off the island alive. I didn't think Jerry Comitu would stay long, with mania for treasure eating into his consciousness and a ship under his feet. I spoke of this to Hoy Mon, adding:

"The Islanders believe that Jerry is to stay and be their king. I was thinking that they might be put wise——"

"Put wise?" Hoy Mon repeated wearily.

"Might be informed of Jerry's penchant for treasure-hunting," I said. "In which case they might make it difficult for him to leave on the *Jezebel*——"

"How would they be furnished with this information?" Hoy Mon inquired concisely.

"Is there no way of getting a message to Labulamo?"

"We have had no affiliations with the Islanders," he answered regretfully. "We have not managed well in any of these things. Not one of our Chinese would go to the native lines other than expectant of death. A very great mistake of policy from the beginning—after the foreign blood entered the house of Tsui

Tsing. The Islanders might have been kept happy with very little expense. In fact, our own tea-pickers might have been kept happy—as in the days when all flourished, and all was the Chinese way."

This was the first intimation I received that Hoy Mon was against the policy of paying in opium. It dawned on me that the old man was curiously ready to quit the whole business. He showed me now, however, that he was not overlooking the situation altogether.

"Our Mr. Comitu will not leave without Miss Magda, and he dares not wait long now, lest the natives ascertain his plan of leaving Magdalena. They expect him doubtless to be their great new king. He might be afraid of our warning them——"

"You think he will bring us terms soon?"

"Yes, even at once—today."

"You think he will call for Magda or promise us another attack?"

Hoy Mon bowed. "You are like Mr. Catten," he siad. "You read one's mind before words."

I was silent. You never can tell when a Chinese is humorous. They laugh alone after-

wards, as one might serve coffee after dinner in a separate place.

"Our position is not impregnable now with the castle damaged." Hoy Mon resumed. "The Islanders have lost fear of our Chinese. If we refuse too long, Comitu will become a parent, instead of a promoter, of revolutions—and will descend upon us—to our detriment——"

"I follow you," said I.

Certain things were clearing now, but the whole business had happened to me, as I told it, without my understanding at the time. Life often comes this way, and so tapestries are made, they say. You don't get any idea of the pattern from the wrong side, where so much of the weaving is done. . . .

It was now yellow day and the birds were singing under the arches. Chireen met me when I stepped into the court:

"He has been calling for you—?"

"Catten?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid he's unconscious again——"

We were hurrying across the court.

"Oh, Jack Bowditch," she said in a low tone.

"They are all looking to you now—as I did at first. You are getting nearer to them all in need, as you did to me at once. . . . And to think that I should have feared for you—feared that you could become—such as this life has made them——"

We had entered the shadow and I saw, close to mine, her tired, exquisite face. That was the first time I knew Chireen could kiss with her eyes.

"Go to him quickly," she whispered.

Catten was unconscious. I stood beside him for some minutes before Chireen found me in the silence. Shadows flickered across his face, and a queer childish innocence under the occasional wince of his lower eyelids. I could see clearer into the soul behind that hard, laughing, weathered young face, with Chireen here. . . . A queer, good Catten, it dawned upon me now. The things he had said to me a little while ago came back to mind.

"He wanted a comrade," I whispered. "I didn't know it, but he wanted a side-kicker—first and last, a man."

Chireen did not answer.

"We are all reaching up for the Hand that is higher," I added. "We are all making God out of something—reaching up to lose ourselves in something that can contain us all. Little Hoolie wants Jerry and Jerry wants buried treasure—that's his romance—and the little Islanders want a king and the Chinese get free of themselves with the black smoke. Catten wants a friend——"

"And you?" Chireen said.

"I want you—the highest that holds all."

Chireen's fingers tightened upon mine, but I imagined there was a slight shake of the head. Coldness came over me, and I said in that leisurely way a man does when he fears to hear the worst:

"What is it, Chireen? Is there a higher quest than man and woman for each other?"

"I don't know—one only hears these terribly deep things from within," she said strangely. "I don't know, but I think there is something beyond man and woman, as we see it now——"

I had never talked to living soul about such things before. Catten looked like a child again.

"Something beyond *love* then?" I said coldly.

"No, not beyond love—never—but a greater and greater romance all the time—Hoolie to change, Comitu to change—the Islanders to change, always the Romance leading to something higher—the Hand always Higher——"

"I will never change," I said.

Her fingers tightened again.

"A woman loves to hear that," she said softly. "That is good to begin upon, but there is a change to love all the time, until man and woman must go apart——"

The chill came again.

"Why apart?" I asked.

"Only to learn the greater love. . . . We must make it more and more wonderful every day—so we will not have soon to be torn apart to finish our lesson. All the world of lovers is divided now."

She saw my troubled face. A low sound came from her throat—like a nesting bird.

"We are here together now," she whispered. "We have found each other. It is wonderful. In this world of divided hearts we have found each other. Oh, we must be great and happy and earn the wonder of this by being more

splendid to others every day. That alone will postpone the hard lesson of separation—for the greater romance——"

"And this—all this that we know is not all?" I said reverently.

"No, the love of man and woman is but the way to the Way——"

That (and so queerly with Catten's face paling and flushing beneath us) was the hour in which I first learned the depth of the soul of Chireen Holt—the time I first learned really to listen to her as to the Voice Within. Catten's consciousness was coming in nearer, and Chireen drew back.

"The way to the Way," she whispered. "We must be brave and splendid and ready for anything that comes—always romance—always making the human divine. . . . Oh, yes, help him all you can. He loves you, Jack——"

She seemed to be an instrument playing alone to me the symphony of the world's sorrow of divided hearts. . . . Suddenly I saw Catten's bantering smile turned up to me from the bed.

"You're back, you old scoundrel," he said

softly. "I managed to wait until you came in again, but for awhile I thought it was going to be too long. Put a bit of liquor in the cup——"

"I was with Hoy Mon," I said. "I hated to stay away——"

I had turned to put the grog in his glass as he asked, but his eyes seemed to call me nearer. The spirit of Chireen was still with me. I saw now how I might have been much more to Catten, had I known *her* longer—that it was only the unfinished things in my own character that made me fear and distrust him. Why, he was like a boy before me now! Surely, it is only our own faults we hate in another. After we are able to manage ourselves perfectly, we have only compassion for failings outside. Catten's eyes were closed, his lips smiling. My fingers tweaked his neck playfully.

"You've had a lot of pain," I muttered. "Say, hadn't I better give you an overhauling—something's hurt, Catten, or you'd be up taking your own drinks——"

"Yes, something's hurt. . . . We'll get to that presently——"

"Could I get you a bit of a needle to help the pain?" I whispered.

He chuckled. "No, old Hoy Mon will handle the syringe presently, if I don't pull out of here——"

"I'm standing by," I said. "We're white men together——"

"Good old Bowditch—I like the sound of that anyway."

I saw the look of embarrassment now, and then his genial words:

"Hell—you didn't get that drink for me. . . . Don't join me, if you don't feel like it —but I sure hate to drink alone——"

I turned to the table where the candle and glasses were, but something felt queer in my head before I touched the bottle. My eyes roved back only to see him with a gun to his head and a laugh on his lips.

"You old scoundrel," he muttered laughing. "You got my thought like a woman. You wouldn't spare yourself seeing this muss."

I was across the room from him—ten feet from his cot.

"Catten!"

The answer was the shot. . . . A little later

when I lifted him, I found that both legs were broken below the knees. It had probably happened when the buffet had fallen upon him, when all the lights went out. . . .

26

IMPORTANT NEGOTIATIONS WITH OUR JERRY, AT THE END OF WHICH HOY MON TOUCHES A BUTTON IN THE ANTEROOM

COMITU never did anything in unseemly hours of the morning. Of course he knew the passage to the bunk-house was mined as well as Hoy Mon himself, and though The Crane lingered in the tunnel long after the bunk-house had been abandoned, there was no attraction for the Islanders in that underground way. The "marvellous" foresight of the builder of the establishment to destroy any aggression on the part of the people of Magdalena had not taken in consideration the possible treachery of one who was aware of the main defensive measures.

Five Chinese belonging to Catten's harbour party had escaped the attack upon the *Jezebel*

and reported at the sentry door before light. They said that all had been well when Mr. Catten left the *Jezebel*, that the guards were all awake and on duty, but that the engineer, Soling Wai, had been killed by an assistant at the first firing. The assistant was of course in Comitu's employ, for he held the auxiliary in dock against all signals by the bridge, until the boarding by the Islanders. Catten would have appreciated this *coup* from his old fellow gamester. The natives reported that a large force of Islanders had gathered in the hills; that the little *Jezebel* was peppered with fire, her decks splintered; that in the boarding, the numbers had been overwhelming.

The hours of morning drew on to mid-forenoon before we saw a party of Islanders gathering across the compound in the pepper trees. It looked more like a festival than an attack, but Hoy Mon was not deluded as to Comitu's purpose. We had the castle, the tunnel, provisions, water and arms for an indefinite if uncomfortable resistance, yet with the *Jezebel* gone, the Islanders aggressive, and the tea plantations neglected, there was not much to hold for—not even for the effigy, Tsui Tsing. I

was more than ever positive that Comitu wanted something now, that his adoring natives were not counting on, but confess my surprise that he dared to appear personally with terms. I never did estimate Jerry adequately in advance. In the most perfect adornment of green, gold and white lace—frightening the lilies where Solomon failed—our Jerry came forward.

His white flag was not particularly obvious —merely a flaunting disclosure until he was told to come forward. There were perhaps thirty Islanders about their leader, covering us with their rifles as unostentatiously as possible. Comitu paused some fifty yards from the main gate of the castle. Hoy Mon and I had already appeared.

"My felicitations to Tsui Tsing," Comitu said at the gate.

"He has them," said Hoy Mon.

Comitu spoke with the dignity of a legal document.

"It will be impossible for me to enter the court unless you or Mr. Catten or Mr. Bowditch take this side for a hostage. . . . I thought you might prefer to send Mr. Bow-

ditch, since you and Mr. Catten would be more interested in arranging terms."

"We cannot spare Mr. Bowditch," Hoy Mon said, "and Mr. Catten is no longer with us, having ceased to live by his own hands."

Comitu raised his helmet. There was silence a moment, then his sentence:

"My men told me about my old neighbour, Major Holt, falling."

Hoy Mon bowed. He seemed without haste and heartily to approve of all these ceremonies, which bored me deep.

"If you would send out, during the hour of discussion, the two young women, Miss Chireen and Miss Magda, they would be in plain sight."

Mystic or not, Hoy Mon pleased me with his conduct of these affairs. He lifted his sleeves, bent his hands downward from the wrists, turning his face sideways, as if in the utmost attenuation from weariness, and stated that he did not care for discussion to the extent of using young women for hostages. At the same time he gratified nothing of the paternal passion of the other, forcing Comitu to ask:

"Are the young women quite well?"

"Miss Holt is quite well, and will you extend my inquiries to Madame Comitu when you return?"

Comitu was lamed right there. The unction went on for several minutes further. No direct question of Magda's welfare was vouchsafed from outside, but when the strain became too intense, Jerry turned on his heel and strode back toward the ledge trail, his colourful self lost presently among the drooping pepper trees. . . . It requires only brain and craft to start a war, but a soul to finish one.

"He does not dare to let his friends know what he wants," Hoy Mon observed.

"There's a lot of kick-back to a double-cross," I remarked.

The Secretary looked at me coldly.

"Our late friend, Mr. Catten, was a living idiom," he said.

I didn't freshen again to the point of using American slang. . . . Toward noon Comitu appeared a second time with a document. He had doubtless spent the hours intervening upon it, and gave it to Hoy Mon through a servant whom he could watch while in the act of delivery. I looked in some curiosity upon Comitu

this day. As Hoy Mon had confided, Jerry appeared to be at the mercy of the domestic consciousness. Moreover, he dared not say what he wanted because he was about to betray the Islanders who had fought for him. Their idea of his remaining to rule everlastingly in the pomp of king was not in the least attractive to one who had outraged the Tsui Tsing Company, the Island Trading Company, the laws of high and inland seas, and the maritime powers of the world. Again Comitu couldn't take his hard-won *Jezebel* and race down to enjoy his freedom in some uncharted southern waters near the Pole—that is, not felicitously without Magda. And there was the ever-restlessness of the treasure-seeker.

Demand for Magda stood out prominently in this document of terms. He essayed that he practically had the island, commanding the harbour, the bunk-house, the plantations, the *Jezebel*, and the *Virgin* accordingly, the goodwill of the natives—points which we were prepared politely to grant, and that all this having befallen us, and the unforeseen deaths of our leaders, the ruin of the lands, loss of pres-

tige and threatened airing of our opium policy.

"He enumerates like a small merchant," Hoy Mon observed as he read. . . .

Having, as set forth, capitulated our calamities, Jerry Comitu announced that he would leave things as they were with us, upon the delivery of Magda in good condition and an absurd sum of money, to mention which would draw attention completely from the closing pages of any tale.

Hoy Mon took a key from his breast and entered the anteroom for a pen. He emerged presently and wrote in English upon a formal card—stationery of the Singapore office:

Will deliver offspring without specification, but require amount for use here.

TSUI TSING *per* HOY MON.

The postscript is the real point:

Please note that the Islanders are not informed of your intention of leaving on the "Jezebel."

I recalled that Catten had called him a mystic.

Within an hour Comitu appeared with what he called his ultimatum, to the effect that if Miss Magda were not restored to him at once, he would order a full-powered attack upon the castle. He intimated that the natives were eager to finish a day's sport with this trifling bit of action. . . . In silence and with conflicting emotions, Magda was sent forth.

I couldn't help believing, even then, that something different might have been done. Hoy Mon sometimes startled and sometimes made me ashamed. . . . The shadows were long in the afternoon when he sent for me in the anteroom. There had been a fresh racket of firing down in the harbour. This I reported.

"You think the natives are already disturbed about Comitu's boarding the *Jezebel?*" Hoy Mon asked absently.

He was standing before a little cabinet, containing a dial or two and certain electric appliances, more or less familiar in appearance. It struck me that here were the buttons for setting off the mines in the tunnel, but apparently another cabinet was for that. The mockery of all such useless preparation presented itself to mind. Hoy Mon glanced over my shoulder to

see if the door were shut into the anteroom. His eyes returned then to the little clock-face that appeared to hold full attention.

"You are right, Mr. Bowditch," he resumed. "He is having trouble in getting away. Still he has cleared. In fact, he is passing around the stern of the *Virgin* now, and there is doubtless much excitement."

"You don't mean you've got a glass on them down there?" I inquired.

"Ah, no,—a spark merely from point to point. . . . She is clear now, clear of the *Virgin*. You see we could suffer no damage to befall the innocent. . . . Poor Comitu, he is beginning to breathe deep. . . . Is it not a terrible thing to have one's emotions tied in painful possession to members of one's household, merely a daughter?"

In my belated way, I began to get the drift, watching in utter fascination. It was hard at first, like finding the mercury in a little temperature bulb, but when my eyes caught the trick I saw a thin red line moving slowly like a burning string across the dial which represented Magdalena harbour in miniature. . . . The *Jezebel* was nearing the narrow neck when

Hoy Mon turned to me—most venerable and sincere, except for the shine on his chin, saying thoughtfully:

"Almost I was persuaded to let him go. Mr. Catten, I am sure, would advise clemency in hope of saving the *Jezebel*. But in his treachery, Mr. Comitu was indirectly responsible for the death of our Master, and as a last duty to the house of Tsui Tsing, I destroy the enemies thereof."

I saw him touch a button. There was a distant muffled detonation, and then all I could notice was that the spark had halted and was fading.

"At the same time it was important not to block the harbour," Hoy Mon added, with a last glance at the dial, "for it would have been unjust to prevent the egress of the *Virgin* which has already been unduly detained."

"Quite right," I allowed.

27

THROUGH LABYRINTHINE WAYS TO THE CENTRAL POINT OF ALL QUESTING, WHILE THE FOUNTAIN PLAYS

A FEW things remain to tell that I was not aware of at the time of the blowing up of the *Jezebel*. The Islanders took another stiff lesson in the stuff white men are made of, when they realised that their great jovial, spectacular king was only a little man after all inside, quite like numerous other merchants, Chinese and foreign, they had known, who had a mysterious madness about treasure and loot. Their *bancos* were persistent about the wreckage of the *Jezebel* until they found Comitu's body; and then they went back to their fishing and jungle life, sober and more deeply mystified than ever about the people of the outer world. They appeared to wall the Tsui Tsing Trading Company from

themselves after that, as some foreign creature that blunders into a bee-hive and is too cumbersome to be moved, is hermetically sealed in wax and forgotten as much as possible. Hoy Mon remarked that we all have dreams of the coming of a king.

Magda and her mother were picked up unhurt, and were among those who sailed for the mainland when the *Virgin* finally cleared. It was three days before Hemiter was permitted to depart, his furious impetuosity being held in check by the mention of further mines at the harbour mouth. As a matter of fact Hoy Mon and the three white men from Singapore were not through with their negotiations. The Europeans belonged to the firm of Tsui Tsing and did not care to remain over another steamer. I was present at most of these negotiations. Hoy Mon refused to stay on the island, explaining that his allegiance was to the Chinese holdings of the Company, and that his interests were back in Canton now that his master was dead.

Hoy Mon further expressed himself utterly out of sympathy with the manner in which life was led and commerce enacted in the island service of the Tsui Tsing company, since the

business went out of Chinese hands. He declared that he had found it a great mistake to give command to young white men who were connoisseurs of liquors and women and firearms, and who dared to murder their masters because of misfortune. Furthermore he did not believe in destroying his own people with opium and confessed that in all the history of the Tsui Tsing Trading company, which was like the history of a province of the empire, never before had affairs existed in such a plight and pity as in Magdalena just before the natives started their aggression; in fact, something else would have happened if Comitu had not betrayed them, because the hour of retribution had struck.

This was softly thrilling to me. I liked the old man better and better as he spoke, and liked the three European traders steadily less as they listened. Hoy Mon declared that he would gather the treasures of his Master for the next call of the *Virgin* and return to the mainland. He said personally that he had no objection to me; in fact, that we had done well together in a few dealings, but that he had never been happy with Mr. Catten, who apparently went

insane at the last. Hoy Mon in his friendly and venerable spirit recommended that I carry out my full duty to the European end of the house, and said he only asked assistance in one task from me from time to time before his departure, which proved to be the embalming of the Yellow Lord for shipment back to China.

I was interested to be drawn apart in counsel with the three Europeans at once after Hoy Mon was dismissed and asked to use my influence to soften the Secretary's idea of the opium trade, even to ask him to remain in charge of the Chinese in Magdalena. This didn't sound true. I quivered a bit. There had been all the crossing of motives I could endure already—double and triple crossings. I told them I couldn't see anything but doing my part until relieved, toward getting another tea-crop ready for shipment. . . . In truth I was tested rather thoroughly by the three, and I knew what they wanted before I left that conference. It was the life of Hoy Mon. Meanwhile they knew I knew. This spoiled my island future, which was well, as *we* decided afterwards, since my morals seem to demand a frost from time to time. . . . I found in that talk that the opium

business was more profitable than the tea business; that the new firm of Tsui Tsing was concerned more about the issue of the poppy flowers than all the rest, one of the big white plagues of the world.

From this glance at our island politics the rest simplifies. Three years before, European capital took over the commanding part of the stock of the Tsui Tsing Trading company. The financial importance of the firm was in no way diminished at this time, though the family had run out the last male issue culminating in our Yellow Lord. All the leases and holdings of the firm were in good condition, one of the big tea-producing companies of the world. The remnants of the original firm, still gathered about the soft spot, Tsui Tsing—all tradition and patriarchal worship centring in the last blood of the house. It appears that it was part of the negotiations between the Europeans and the existing laterals of the Chinese house that the final holder of the name be preserved at the head of affairs as long as he lived. Modern capital appeared to be glad of this arrangement and to welcome it as a part of the good will of the purchase. Magdalena was chosen as the

headquarters of the Yellow Lord. . . . And Catten——

I'm not going into the letters he left me; at least, as to the affair that kept him from going home to England and taking the field of his country. That's his business, and you know almost as much about him as I do. But since the island tale is to be finished, the circle can only be completed with the statement that Catten's work on the last night of his life—it's rather hard to put down—wasn't altogether to save Magda. Magda's part was only a long awaited opportunity. The fact is, the life of Tsui Tsing was part of Catten's contract. He was not with Hoy Mon as I fancied so long, but with the European interests of the house, which had found that the Yellow Lord and Hoy Mon were not profitable. As I say, I might have signed up to *get* Hoy Mon (as no Chinese on the island would have done) but I played—well, I played instead to the heart of Chireen Holt, where the double-cross was twisted to a swastika, which they tell me is the eternal symbol of goodness and beauty and truth.

By the way, I haven't told you where she

went that night a few minutes before the explosion under the castle. Chireen didn't tell me at once; that's why the line is out of place. She had seen Catten leave by the sentry-gate and supposed he had returned to the harbour. Instead, as you know, he came back for one more drink with me. In the meantime Chireen went out to our place of tryst at the banyan-tree, thinking I might get the thought to join her. Then from outside, she saw Catten return to the gate, and was waiting for a chance to slip in behind him, when she heard sounds still farther on toward the west wall. Chireen had to know the meaning of these sounds which proved to have to do with the Islanders gathering for an attack on the bunk-house. It was not until she learned the purpose of Jerry's reconnoitre party that she was ready to return. The firing on the bunk-house gave her the meaning. The explosion under the castle occurred while she was still far away near the blue lagoon. . . .

It may seem hard to credit after all we had gone through that we could suffer any tension from the mere presence of three commercial

Europeans, but it was true. I walked down through the pepper-trees after a final conference, and waited there until the *Virgin* not only cleared, but made the passage out through the portal. I did this through sheer will-power—as a sort of propitiatory offering. For more than an hour I stood there, and every moment I felt Chireen calling, calling more intimately. . . . We had both looked forward to this hour. Swiftly at last I walked back. A Chinese let me into the castle by the north gate.

It was very quiet and strange in the big sunlit court—Catten gone, Comitu gone with the two women of his house, Major Holt gone, and the Yellow Lord from his room of a thousand treasures. . . . I wondered that Chireen did not come, as I tapped upon the open door of her quarters.

A low growl answered.

"It's all right, Shiela," I said, entering.

Even Lance was out. The she-hound was lying in her broad canopied box, still unable to move much from her wounds. I saw her stern eyes soften, the head lower in courtesy to me. The sunlight came through and rested in diamond flecks upon the table-cover and a

book or two. Trying to clear the dryness from my throat, I walked on softly, into the little breakfast room and farther into the place where Catten had lain, the end of the apartment on this side. There was a room or two on the other side of the sitting-room, but that was a part of the suite I had not seen. . . .

I was back in the sitting-room again. I spoke hoarsely to Shiela. . . . It seemed something was wrong with my tumultuous adoration—that I must have made a mistake about it being answered—that surely it could not be answered—such as I, from such a woman! I had come to her as if she had already been my own.

"Chireen!" I called.

Queer how I can tell all this. A man puts down in a story things he wouldn't tell his best friend at a dinner with wine. I pushed aside the screen that entered into a mysterious part of the house. . . . No answer.

I went through the corridor there and the little hall that turned after three steps down. I smelled the jasmine and heard the water flowing through earthen pipes, the air playing across damp, earthen tiles. I knew—fanciful perhaps—that this was her bathing-place. Jasmine and

sandal for that, and the water over the earthen tiles. I should always remember.

"Chireen!" I called.

And then I came to a wicker-door which swung forward at my touch. Tensity in the silence. In a flash I was aware that she was not present. This was the end of the house—her own room, her own fragrance. The little pallet lay there in the checkered sunlight and something about it all made me back out rather than turning on my heel, the gentle breath of her like a living thing in a mind greatly tortured. . . . For a moment I stood again where the fountain played in the daylight. It seemed I had never breathed air so soft, so moist and fragrant. My mind was dipping back into the ages, seemingly touching all pain and power of trysts in Babylon and Damascus, by mountain-spring and desert-pool—lovers making ready for their meetings—always making ready at the fountains apart. In the pain of that queer lifted moment there was in memory one lotus pond where the fountain played the basic theme of all romance to me—the shimmer of sunset, the breath of flowering tea-lands and something immortal of the face I knew as Chireen now.

I don't understand it all yet—that inner life moment. It seemed I had to pass alone through that fountain-place, past the wicker into the little room beyond and stand there a moment dreaming, listening to the dripping tiles and the fountain's spray—to get the full measure of life's enchantment afterward.

"Chireen!"

Then lightly, flippantly even, from across the court in the music-room began our theme, the waltz of the tryst—Chireen playing as on the first day. A groan went from me, and I was running across the Court.

"I'm coming," I called.

That was a real beginning—the big laughing, crying story of two together—the story that never ends. . . . It seems I don't know when to stop. I was just now about to put down another scene at the banyan-tree—the shimmering light about her shoulders and the perfumed breeze and the red-gold dusk—another time we really found each other, which is to say I found myself.

END















